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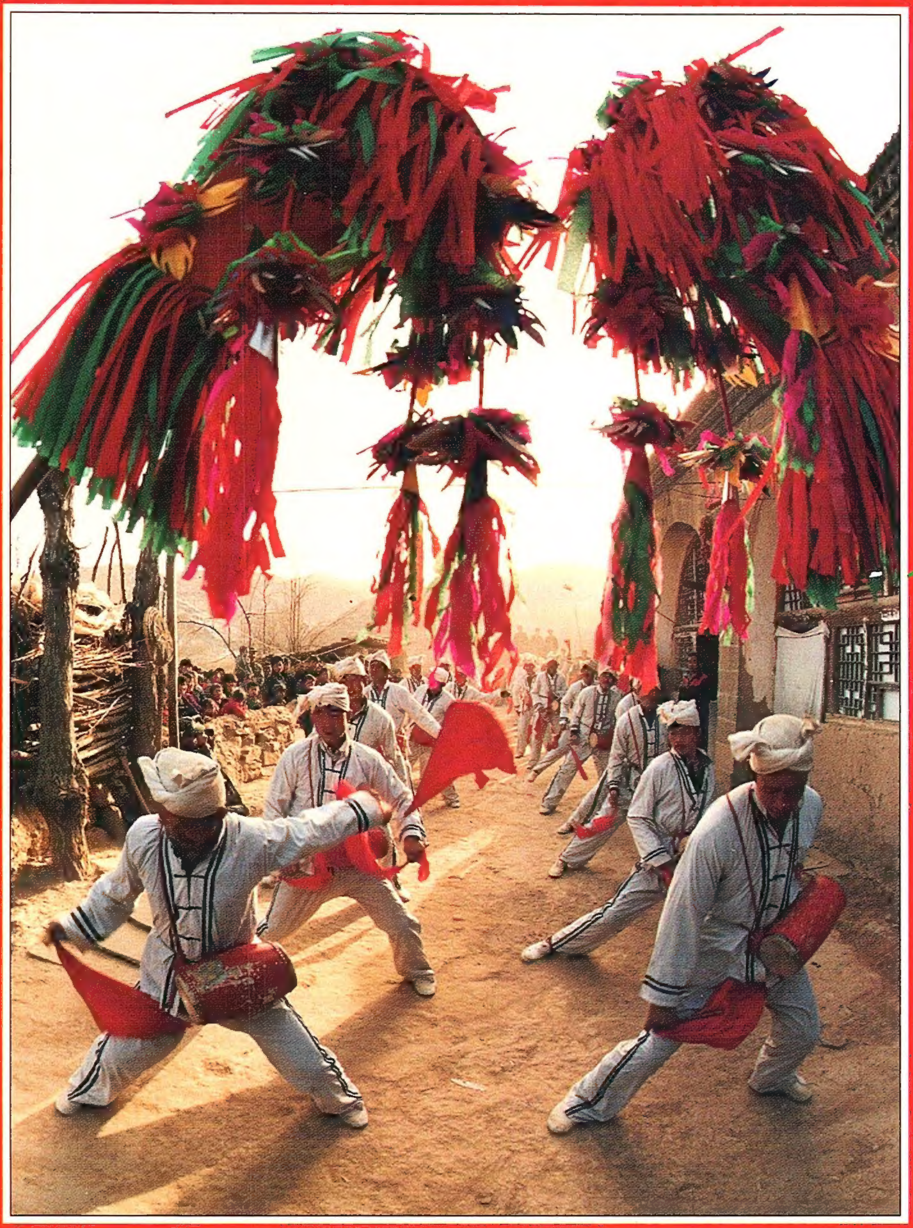

CHINESE NEW YEAR

A SPECIAL ISSUE COVERING NEW YEAR'S CUSTOMS THROUGHOUT CHINA

151

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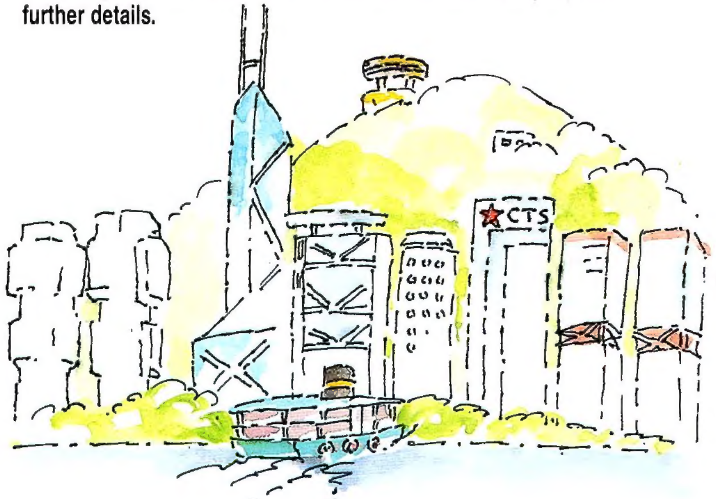

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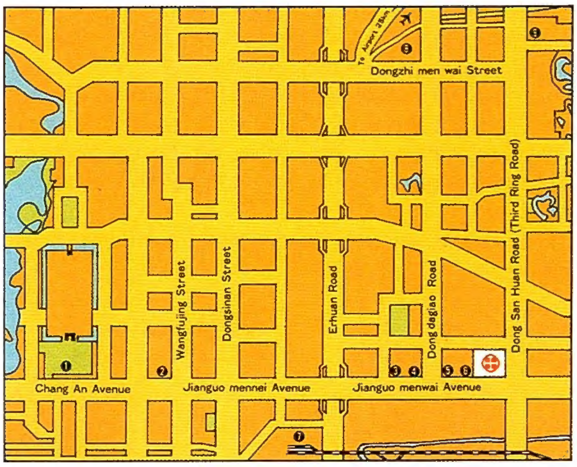
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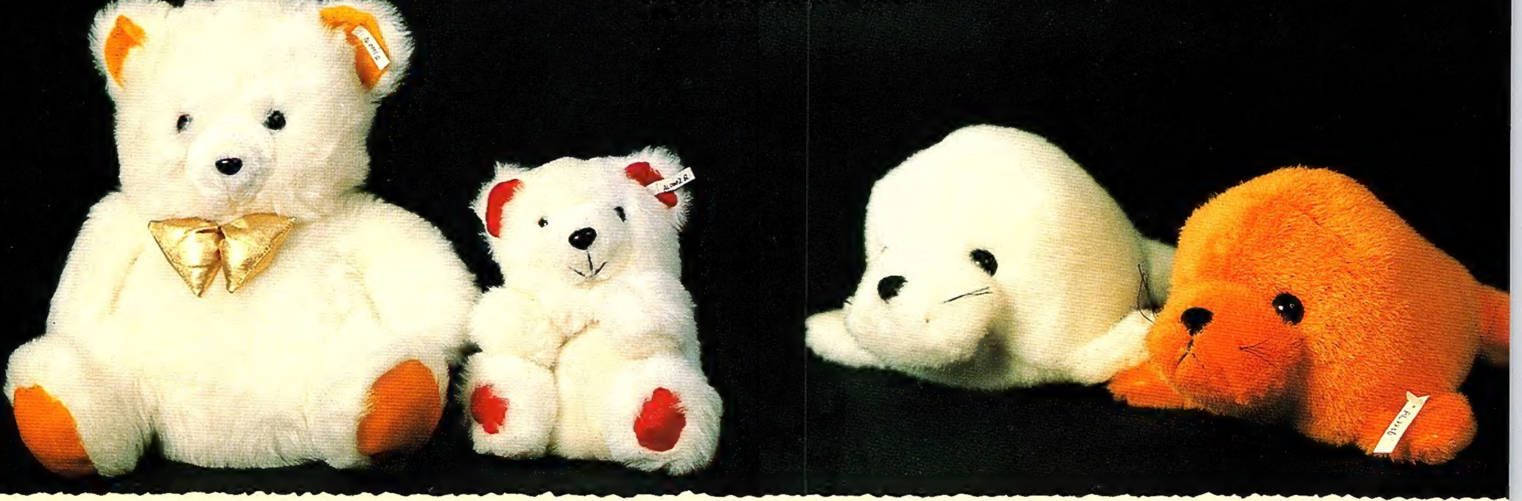

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LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

To a large extent, Chinese festivals may be regarded as times of particular significance during the year when people consider it important to harmonize their lives and actions with the changing phases of the year. The overriding purpose is to promote the orderly progression of the annual cycle. The Lunar New Year marks the beginning of this cycle; therefore it is the preeminent holiday in the lunar calendar. It is not surprising then that the activities of the Spring Festival, as the fortnight immediately following the New Year is called, are the most abundant and lively of all. CHINA TOURISM, to commemorate the arrival of the Year of the Rooster, in this issue presents many of these activities, some of which, like the New Year holiday itself, date back centuries if not thousands of years.

The beginning of the Lunar New Year, like its counterparts in other cultures, involves certain basic human concerns. The Chinese New Year is a time of religious activity, as you can see in the articles "Joy Between Gods and People" and "Stories of the Kitchen God". Priority is also accorded to ancestor worship at this time.

The New Year is also a time of feasting, merriment and relaxation, which seems to set the tone and tempo of activity for the Spring Festival. Vivid examples of the gay atmosphere prevailing at this time can be seen in "A Great Cooking Event", "*Shehuo* Performances", and "Thousands of Families Gather to See the Theatre in Its Varied Forms". Some of the most important annual festivities held during this time are captured in text and on film in "The Lunar New Year — Prelude to the Spring Festival", and "Festival from the First to the Fifteenth Day of the First Lunar Month". In this regard, the second most important day is the Lantern Festival, the fifteenth day of the first month, when the Spring Festival celebration ends in a literal blaze of glory, as you will see in "Night Bright as Day" and "Lantern Festival — The Climax of the Spring Festival".

Finally, one cannot forget the purpose of the Lunar New Year, that it is a time for renewal, to replace the old and bad with the new and good, and to study signs and symbols to ascertain whether one's luck would be favourable during the coming year. "New Year's Eve and New Year's Day", "A Propitious Snowfall Promises a Good Harvest" and "The Whole Year's Work Depends on a Good Spring" provide the readers with insight into the New Year as a revival of the annual cycle and its extended significance as representing hope for a better future.

The New Year officially commences on January 23, 1993. We wish to take this opportunity to wish all of our readers the very best in all of their endeavours during the coming Year of the Rooster.

No.151 January 1993

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New Year's Eve and New Year's Day (32)

Some activities of the two big days, such as New Year sacrifices, the family reunion dinner and staying up all night on New Year's Eve, are described.

Happy Reunion of Every Family (34)

Festival from the First to the Fifteenth Day of the First Lunar Month (50)

The activities and symbolic significance of the New Year's first fifteen days are presented. The festival is a Chinese style carnival also celebrated by many ethnic nationalities.

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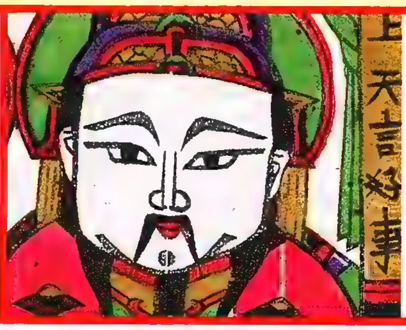
Some of the more colourful tales behind the New Year customs and the reckoning of time are related here.

Preliminary activities leading up to the celebration of the New Year start three weeks in advance. As soon as *Laba* has passed, a variety of endeavours such as a thorough house cleaning, giving thanks to the Kitchen God, spring couplets renewal, and more commence.

A Great Cooking Event (22)



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t is important, especially in an agricultural society, to get the year off to a good start. The rituals of "Beating he Spring Buffalo", praying to the God of the Earth and the Barn Filling Festival mark the conclusion of the celebrations and the beginning of spring.

China

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New Year Celebrations

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Legends Surrounding the Traditional Chinese New Year

What does the Chinese word "nian" which is usually translated as "year" connote? And how did the traditional way of celebrating the Chinese New Year evolve through the course of history?

According to a legend popular among farmers, Nian once was the name of a monster in ancient China. The monster slept the whole year round except for the thirtieth day of the twelfth or final month in the traditional Chinese calendar. On that day, it roamed from place to place, injuring or killing people and livestock. On one New Year's Eve, Nian came to a village where several buffalo boys were cracking their herding whips in a competition. The monster was so frightened by the loud and explosive sound that it fled to another village. On arrival, it spotted some bright red clothes hanging on the line to dry. Nian was terrified and ran away. When it reached the third village, it stopped in front of a house and peeked through a crack on the door. The bright candle illumination inside made it feel dizzy. Once again, Nian fled in panic.

People thus came to realize that Nian's fatal weakness was its fear of light, red colour and explosive sound. So to scare away Nian, they started setting off fireworks and firecrackers and putting on colourful clothes as a way to celebrate the New Year.

When all is said and done, legends are just legends. They cannot change the fact that Spring Festival marks the beginning of a year, according to the lunar calendar.

As to the origin of the Spring Festival, one legend has it that during the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th centuries B.C.), a young man named Wan Nian (meaning ten thousand years) was worried about the confusion in the solar terms of the calendar indicating the relative position of the earth's orbit around the sun. The confusion had unfavourably affected farming activities. To remedy the difficult situation, Wan Nian carefully recorded the time with a sundial and a clepsydra. Finally, he succeeded in determining four of the twenty-four solar terms, the Spring Equinox, the Autumn Equinox, the Summer Solstice and the Winter Solstice.

The official responsible for the observation of climatic variations then was a man called A Heng. Being ignorant and incompetent, he was negligent in executing his duty. He tried to put the blame for his dereliction on the common folks whom, he said, had offended the gods. He suggested to King Zuyi to make sacrificial offerings to the gods in order to determine the solar terms. His suggestion was accepted and the king attended the rites at the head of his ministers and other officials. At the same time, a royal edict on offering sacrifices to Heaven was sent across the nation. Amidst all the commotion, Wan Nian requested an audience with the king, taking along his sundial and clepsydra. The king was convinced by his explanation and ordered the construction of a sundial and a clepsydra in front of the altar. To ensure that Wan Nian could devote all his time and energy to more accurately measure solar terms, the king assigned twelve boys to be his attendants.

A Heng, sensing a threat to his position, decided to get rid of Wan Nian. The incompetent official paid an assassin an enormous sum of money to take the life of Wan Nian. Unable to get close to the young man, the assassin tried to shoot him to death at a distance with an arrow. He failed in his treacherous mission, as the arrow succeeded in hitting only Wan Nian's arm. The assassin was later caught and beheaded.

When the king came to the Sun and Moon Pavilion at the altar, the site of the sundial and clepsydra, Wan Nian said to him, "Your Majesty, t's midnight now. The old year has been completed and the new year has begun. Please define the beginning period of the year."

The king said, "Let's call it the Spring Festival since spring is the first season of the year."

Wan Nian stayed on at the pavilion in pursuit of refining time measurement. After long years of observation and through meticulous calculation, he finally worked out a solar calendar. Whe he presented it to the king, Wan was already an old man with silvery hair. Deeply touched, the king named the calendar the "Wan Nian Calendar" and granted him the title, "The Sun-and-Moon God of Longevity".

People today refer to the traditional Chinese New Year celebration as the Spring Festival and put up pictures of the god of longevity as part of their preparations for the occasion. It is said their purpose in doing so is to commemorate the venerable Wan Nian.

The above legends are products of the imagination and creativity of the common folks in China. In reality, what "nian" indicates is the replacement of one solar term by another.

In ancient times, the length of time needed for the growth of grain was referred to as "nian". In other words, one "nian" or a year was the period for one crop of grain. The term "you nian" meant "good harvests" and the term "da you nian" signified bumper harvests. Later, people began to determine the divisions in the calendar according to astronomical observation to meet the need for proper arrangement of farming activities. The Xia calendar, developed during the Xia and Shang Dynasties (c. 21st-11th century B.C.), consisted of twelve months, and each month represented a lunar cycle. The first day of the month, when no moon could be seen, was called "shuo" and the fifteenth day of the same month, when a full moon appeared, was called "wang". Each month began at midnight on "shuo" while the near year was ushered in at midnight on "shuo" of the first month. The new year was also referred to as a "nian".

The date for New Year's Day differed from one dynasty to another. During the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st-16th centuries B.C.), the first day of the first lunar month was regarded as New Year's Day, but in the Shang Dynasty, the date was changed to the first day of the twelfth month. The succeeding Zhou Dynasty set the first day of the eleventh month as New Year's Day and the Qin Dynasty moved the date to the first day of the tenth month. Emperor Wudi (reign dates 140-87 B.C.) of the Western Han Dynasty, however, resumed the old practice of celebrating New Year's Day on the first day of the first month. He took the action as a result of the suggestion made by the noted historian, Sima Qian (145/135 B.C.-?), within the compilation of the book, *Records of the Historian.* Thus, the Xia calendar or the agricultural calendar was put back into use. During the more than 2,000 years which have since passed, the first day of the first month has remained the date on which Chinese New Year's Day was celebrated.

When to celebrate New Year's Day has much to do with the 24 divisions of the solar year in the traditional Chinese calendar known as the Solar Terms. Since China has had an agriculturally based economy for thousands of years, it attaches greater importance to the Spring Festival than to other traditional festivals.

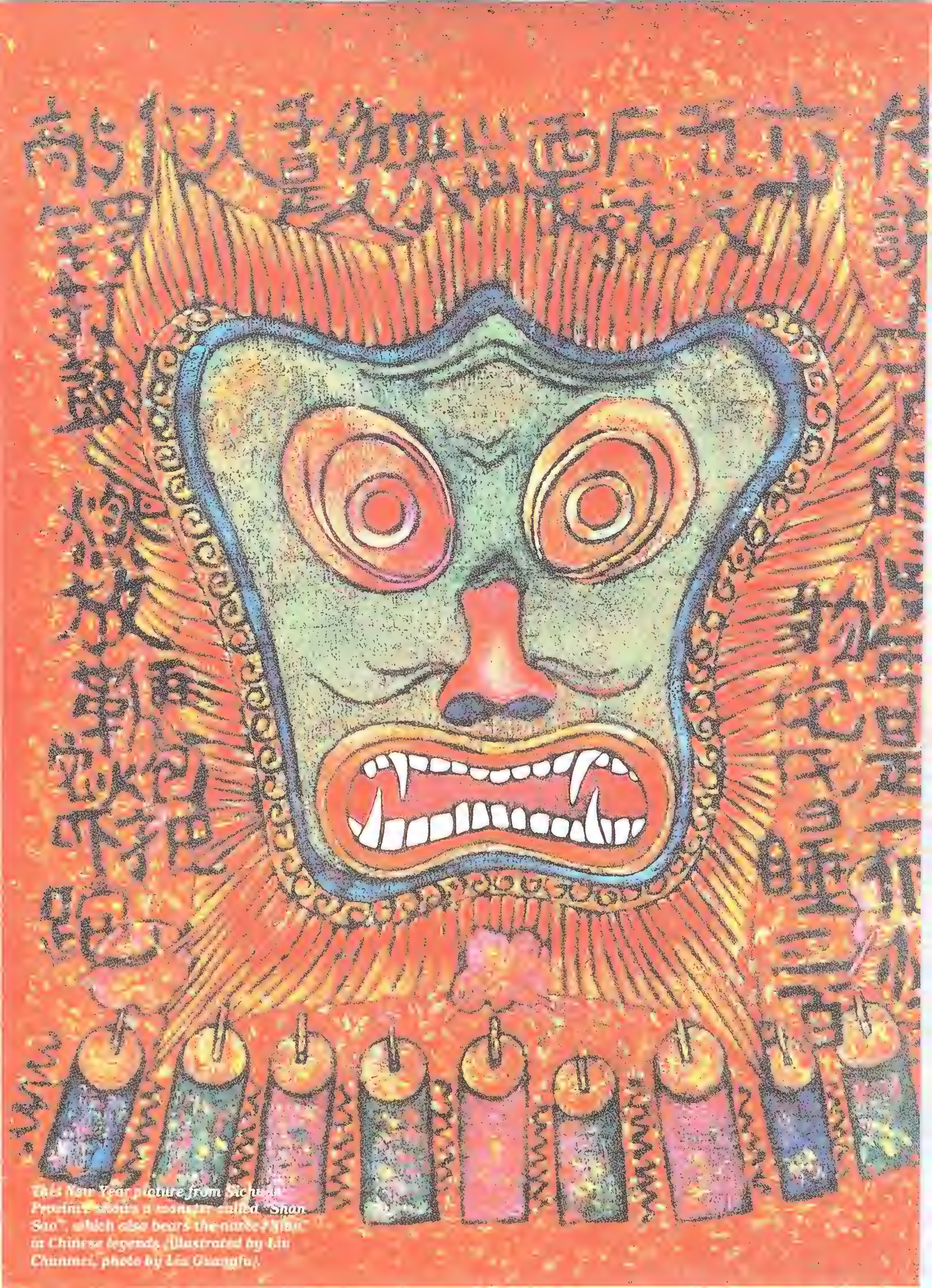
According to historical records, farmers in ancient times drank a kind of liquor known as "Spring Wine" to celebrate the New Year. It was during the Jin Dynasty (265-420) that firecrackers first appeared as a favourite New Year item, and their explosive sound added to the festive atmosphere of the occasion.

In fact, activities related to the celebration of the Chinese New Year last more than a month. The festive mood is anticipated even during the twelfth month. Festivities climax on the first day of the first month and continue on through the Lantern Festival, the fifteenth day of the same month. After that day, everyone is ready to commence work in the new year.

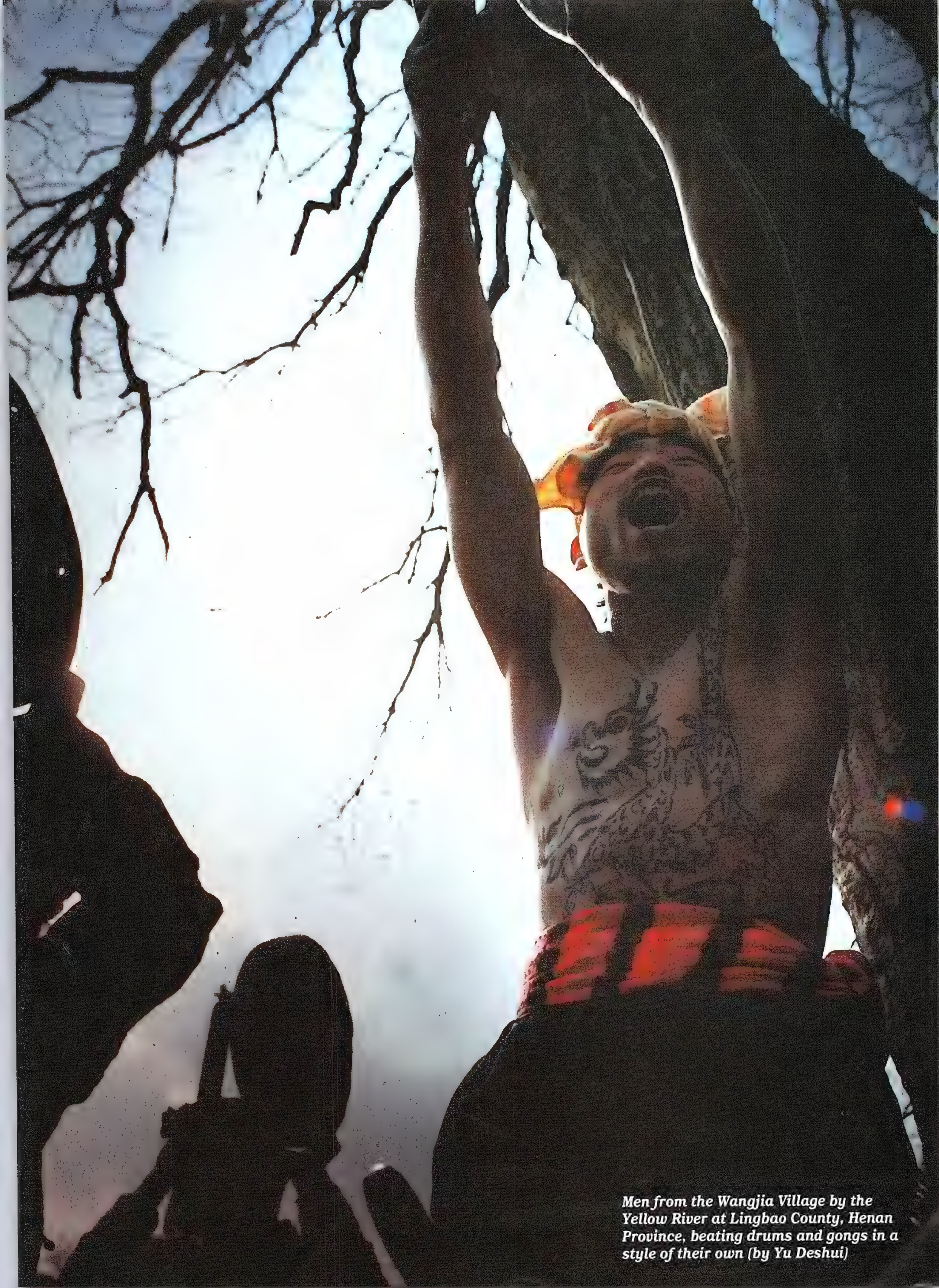
For an agricultural society, it is proper to take the first day of the first month as New Year's Day. Since winter has set in, the farmers have completed virtually all their farm work, and they are indoors more often. Thus, in their leisure, they can afford to spend their time in revelry.

A long time ago, however, the festivities after a year of good harvests were an expression of gratitude to the gods and were also marked by sacrificial offerings to one's ancestors. People usually cooked freshly husked rice and brewed wine with the grain they had just gathered. They offered the cooked rice and the wine as sacrifices to the gods and their ancestors, praying to them for continued bumper harvests during the new year. Nowadays, few believe in many of the old superstitions, but the tradition has been handed down from generation to generation.

Translated by Anne Yan



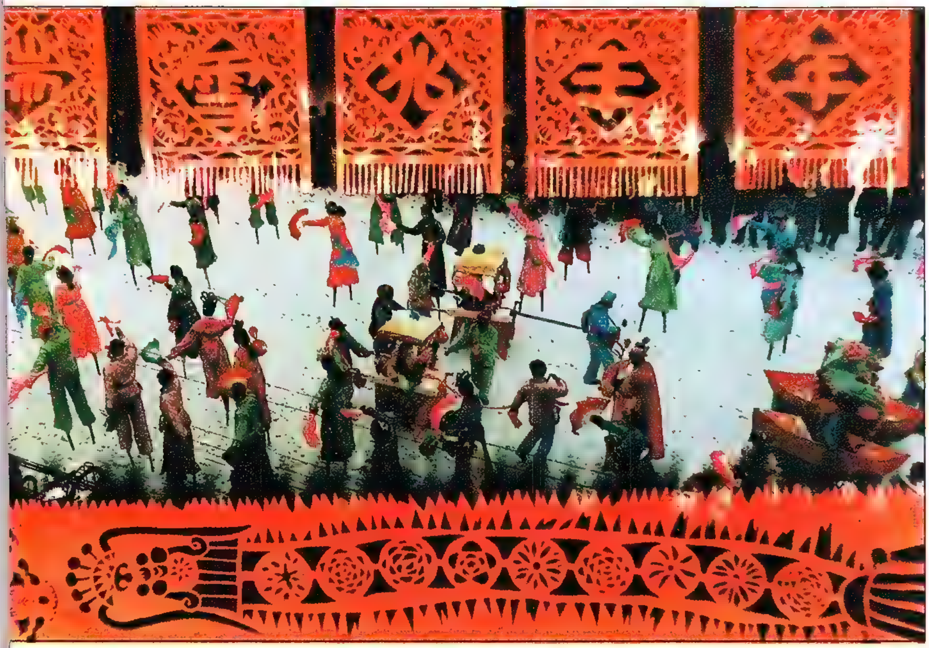
This New Year picture from Sichuan Province shows a monster called "Shan Sao", which also bears the name "Nian" in Chinese legends (Illustrated by Liu Chunmei, photo by Liu Guangfu).



Men from the Wangjia Village by the Yellow River at Lingbao County, Henan Province, beating drums and gongs in a style of their own (by Yu Deshui)

A drum and gong team formed by 160 husky men from the Wangjia Village. Spreading out in the formation of ancient Chinese troops, they beat drums and gongs in unison, and the reverberating sound rocks the whole place (by Yu Deshui).

Children of Lishui City, Zhejiang Province, joyfully setting off firecrackers. They probably know nothing about the legend that loud noises were originally used to scare away the monster Nian (by Lin Yongle).



It is the custom of people in the mountain areas of eastern Liaoning Province to paste on the lintels or windows of their houses coloured paper with decorative patterns or auspicious characters during the Spring Festival. And yangko *teams, composed of both young and old people, dance to their hearts' content to the accompaniment of drums, gongs and* suonas *(by Cong Sheng).*

A traditional Spring Festival bonfire party at Yindou Village, Mizhi County, Shaanxi Province. The party-goers set up a Fire Pagoda with large pieces of square-shaped coal and perform the Yangko Dance around it. On the 15th day of the month, they will once again circle round the pagoda to bring good fortune during the coming year (by Zhao Dapeng).

The Lesser New Year — Prelude to the Spring Festival

Many preeminent festivals in China and elsewhere begin preliminary activities before the actual date of the main celebration. For he Spring Festival, the prelude commences on the eighth day of the welfth lunar month and continues until the last day of the year. This eriod is popularly referred to as the Lesser New Year.

One custom from ancient times which has survived to this day is the ating of *Laba* (the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month) porridge. It is kind of rice congee seasoned with nuts and dried fruits and bearing he name of this specific day.

As early as the Qin Dynasty over 2,000 years ago, the twelfth month n the traditional Chinese calendar was designated *Layue* or the *La* onth. And during the succeeding Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), he eighth day of the month became officially known as the *Lari* or the *a* Day.

La originally was a name given to a ritual which involved offering acrifices to family ancestors and household gods rather than more dis- ant deities, not unlike the present New Year. This ritual was held during he last month of the year and conferred its name on that month, which as called *Layue*. The date of the *La* ceremony was unfixed, being held t different times within different regions.

One of the purposes of the *Lari* sacrifice was to dispel evil spirits and estilence. This purpose has long been replaced by the practices of of- ring sacrifices to the gods and the ancestors and enjoying *Laba* por- dge.

There are a number of explanations for the practice of eating the *Laba* porridge. One story says that the eighth day of the twelfth month was the day on which Sakyamuni, founder of Buddhism, attained immortality and thus became the Buddha. Buddhist temples, therefore, cooked the porridge on this special day year after year for the faithful and the practice gradually gained popularity among the common folks. Another legend has it that before he came to power, Emperor Taizu (reign dates 1368-1398) of the Ming Dynasty tended oxen for a landlord and often went hungry. One time he dug up some rice, beans, millet and red dates from a mouse cave. He put them together and cooked himself a hearty meal. After he ascended the throne, he grew tired of the court delicacies and one day remembered the porridge he had once cooked. He then ordered the imperial kitchen to follow his instructions and prepare the porridge which he still found most delicious. It happened to be the eighth day of the twelfth month and so he named the food after the day.

Actually the pace of activity quickens considerably from about the twenty-third day of the twelfth month and the atmosphere becomes increasingly more lively. The parents of the family are busily engaged in preparations for the coming celebrations such as shopping, making new clothes for their children and cleaning the house properly for the arrival of the New Year.

Replacing the Old Peach-Wood Charms with the New

The purpose of the Lesser New Year is to get rid of the old and to replace it with the new.

There is a common saying in regard to the preparations for the Spring Festival which goes: For rich or poor alike, house cleaning comes first. This is to say that beginning with the despetch of the Kitchen God on through till the very end of the outgoing year, every household undergoes a thorough house-cleaning, in which process contents in wardrobes, suitcases and chests must be rearranged; dust accumulated throughout the year at every corner in the house, of course including beams and pillars, must be removed.

There is an interesting legend behind the origin of the practice of "sweeping the dust". In order to keep informed of what is happening on earth, the Jade Emperor sends down the Sanshi (Three Corpses) God to the earth who returns to heaven to report at the end of every year. To curry favour with the Jade Emperor, he would tell lies such as, "People on the earth are rough and even swear at the Jade Emperor." Enraged at this, the emperor orders the Sanshi God to write down the names of those people outside their houses. Then on the New Year's Eve, the emperor despatches heavenly generals and soldiers to arrest and punish the people one by one. The Kitchen God finds this not fair in the least. He thinks hard and before going up to heaven on the 24th day of the twelfth month he tells every family to make sure that their houses are kept clean. Then on the thirtieth day of the month, when the heavenly troops come down again to arrest people, they are unable to find any names written outside the houses. The Jade Emperor then punishes the Sanshi God by sending him down to the depths of hell for making false reports to the supreme ruler. To repay the kindness of the Kitchen God, people sweep clean their houses before they send the god away on his annual trip to heaven. Over the years, they have gradually added other steps to this procedure such as taking a bath after completing the requisite house-cleaning chores.

Some people hold the view that as early as the legendary Yao and Shun periods before the Xia Dynasty, the Chinese had already started the custom of "sweeping the year", the expression used in ancient times to refer to house-cleaning before the Spring Festival. It began as an ancient religious ceremony to get rid of diseases and gradually evolved into house-cleaning at the end of the year.

Spring Couplets Originally Peach-Wood Charms

To celebrate the Spring Festival, all families put up spring couplets, which in ancient times were also known as "door posters".

According to one story, there was once a huge peach grove owned by two brothers called Shen Tu and Yu Lei. The peaches they grew helped people achieve immortality. Upon learning this, a prince came with his followers all dressed up like demons and ghosts to steal the peaches. The brothers fought the invaders off using peach tree branches and tied them up to feed to the tigers.

Later, after the brothers had passed away, they are said to have gone up to heaven where the heavenly god put them in charge of punishing ghosts. Therefore, it became a custom for people to make two peach-wood plates written with the brothers' name and then they would hang the plates on each side of the door at every Spring Festival to chase away ghosts and evil spirits. These plates, called peach-wood charms, were the earliest prototype of spring couplets.

Years later Meng Chang (919-965) of the State of Later Shu (934-965) during the period of the Five Dynasties wrote down a two-line verse on the plates which was considered to be the first spring couplet ever written. Finally Emperor Taizu who founded the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) ordered that every household of noble status should have spring couplets written on red paper placed on their doors on New Year's Eve. Eventually, hanging spring couplets gradually became a popular custom practised by all.

New Year Pictures, Door God Portraits and Streamers

As the Spring Festival approaches, putting up New Year pictures is another custom which expresses people's good wishes for the coming year.

There are several dozen kinds of New Year pictures, with various subject matter including folktales, characters from operas and dramas, landscapes, birds and flowers and more. In artistic style, those produced at Yangliuqing in Tianjin are known for their detail and elegance; those from Yangjiabu in Weifang, Shandong Province, and Taohuawu in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, stand out for their strong images and bold lines. New Year pictures from Beijing and northwestern China are famous for being unrestrained and having vigorous strokes. In addition, there are brightly coloured pictures from Zhangzhou in Fujian Province, Foshan in Guangdong Province, Shanghai and other places.

New Year pictures originated from Door God pictures during ancient times. The earliest pictures pasted on the door mostly featured figures from fairy tales who supposedly could dispel evil spirits and exorcise demons and ghosts. Peach-wood plates bearing the portraits of the Door God based on the image of real people first appeared on doors during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Development of wood-block carvings resulted in New Year pictures being printed from wood blocks, called "paper pictures", during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

In addition to New Year pictures, people love to put up red papers written with the character meaning "good fortune" to express their desire for better luck and greater wealth during the new year.

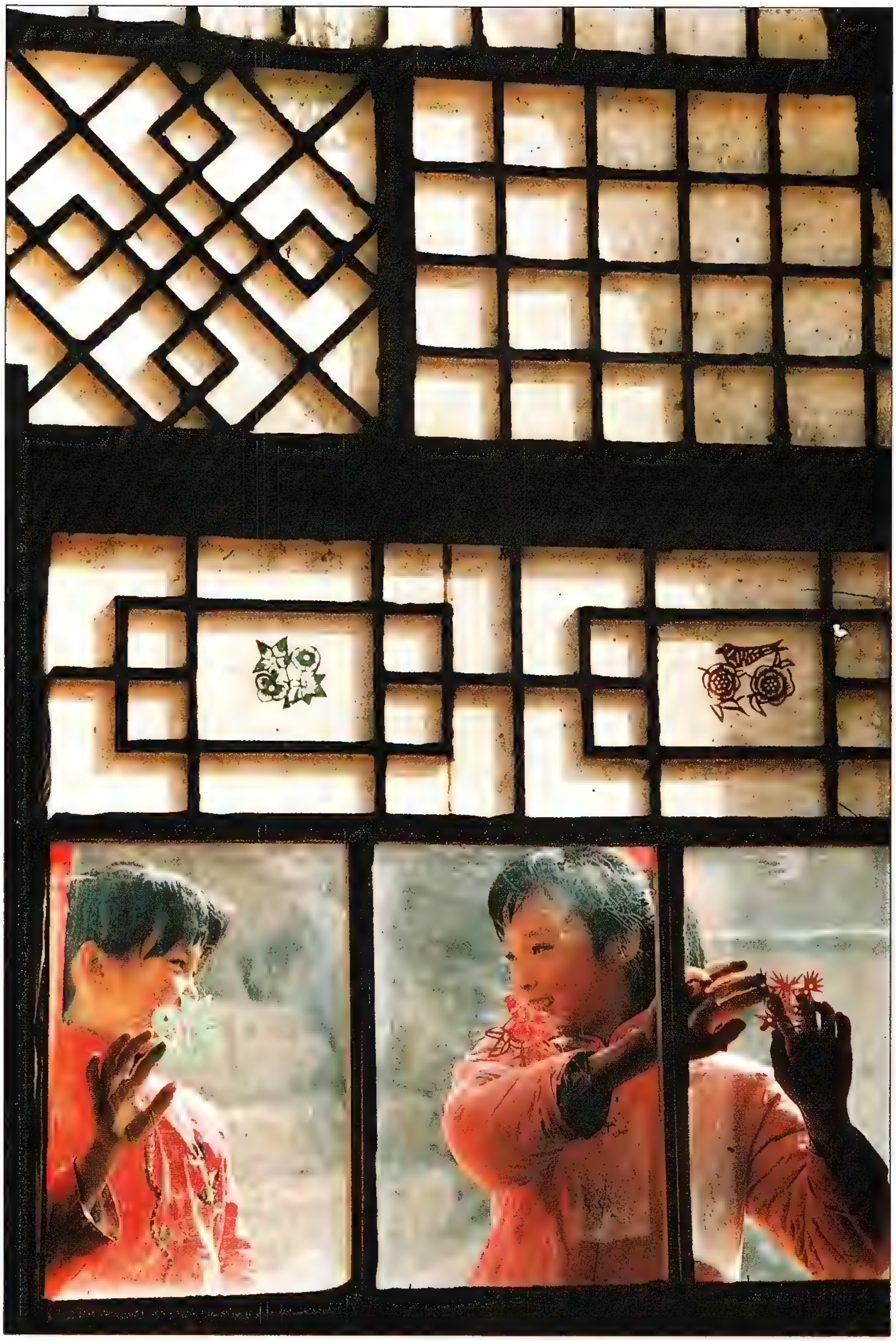
Of the same genre and often posted together with spring couplets, New Year pictures, "good fortune" character signs and window paper-cuts are door streamers which are still very popular in rural China. Before and during the Spring Festival, rows upon rows of colourful streamers in front of every house can be seen fluttering in the wind.

Flower Markets

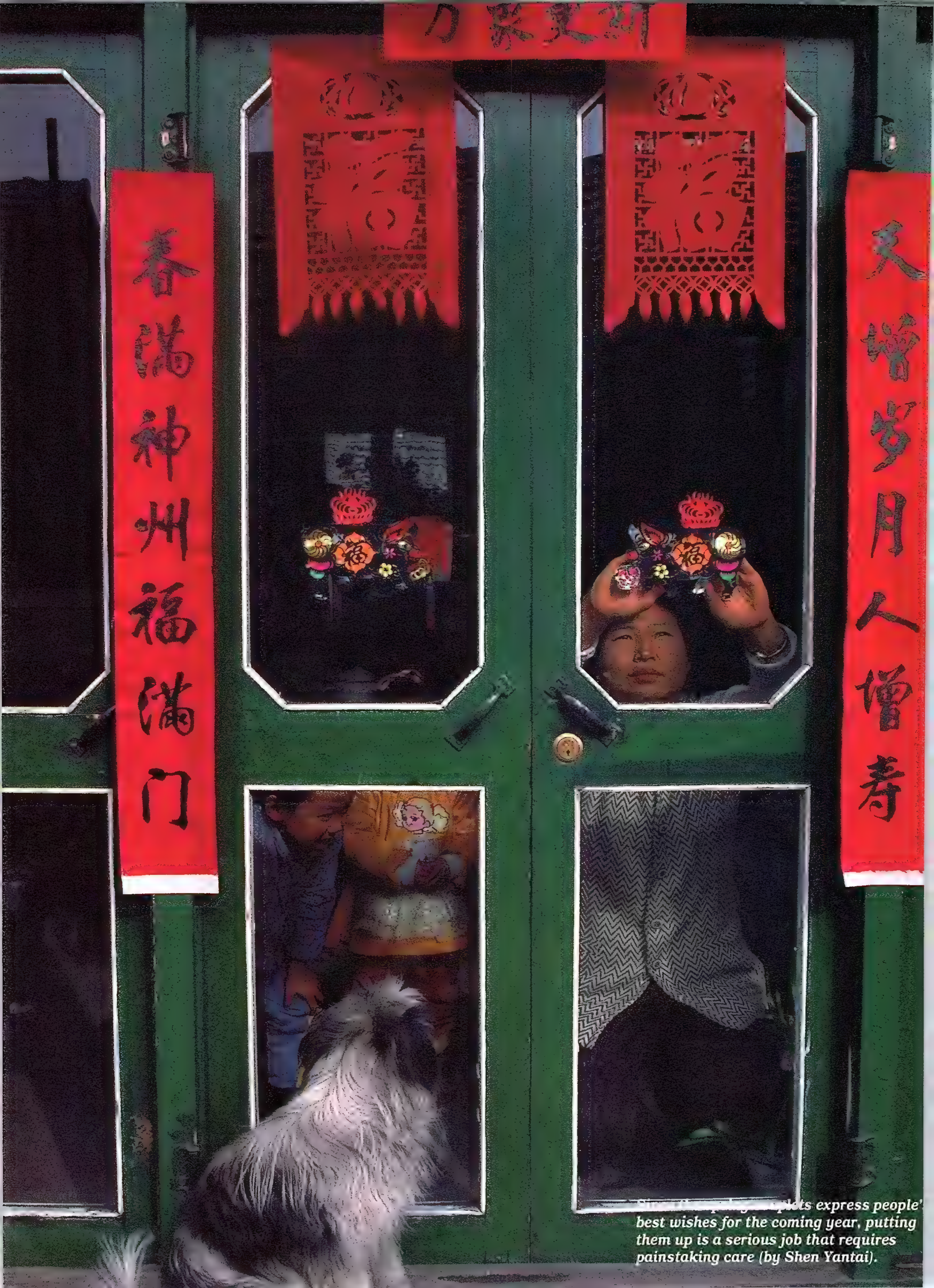
To bid goodbye to the old and welcome the new year, it is a custom for people to take a bath and change into their Sunday best just before the Spring Festival arrives. This is another way to express people's hope for better fortune during the coming year.

The Flower Markets in Guangzhou and Hong Kong are perhaps the most naturally splendid event among the various popular folk activities. New Year's Eve Flower Markets actually have an ancient tradition. During the Ming Dynasty, at Zhuangtou on the southern bank of the Pearl River in Guangzhou, there were already people whose occupation was cultivating flowers for just such an occasion. They sent jasmine on boat to the Wuxian Dock in the city. There were so many boats bearing flowers that the dock earned the name of the "Flower Ferry" and became a flower market.

Since the Spring Festival is the most important festival of the year among common folks, people love to buy fresh flowers to decorate their homes or as a way to express their hope of good luck. As people throng to the flower market, some pick up tangerine plants as a symbol of good luck, while others buy peach flowers in hope of good marriage. Of course yet others purchase narcissi or tulips for their colour.



Putting up paper-cuts on their windows in rural Mizhi County, Shaanxi on New Year's Eve. It is customary for people in northern Shaanxi who have a particular love for paper-cuts to dress up their windows this way as part of their Spring Festival activities (by Wang Nianyue).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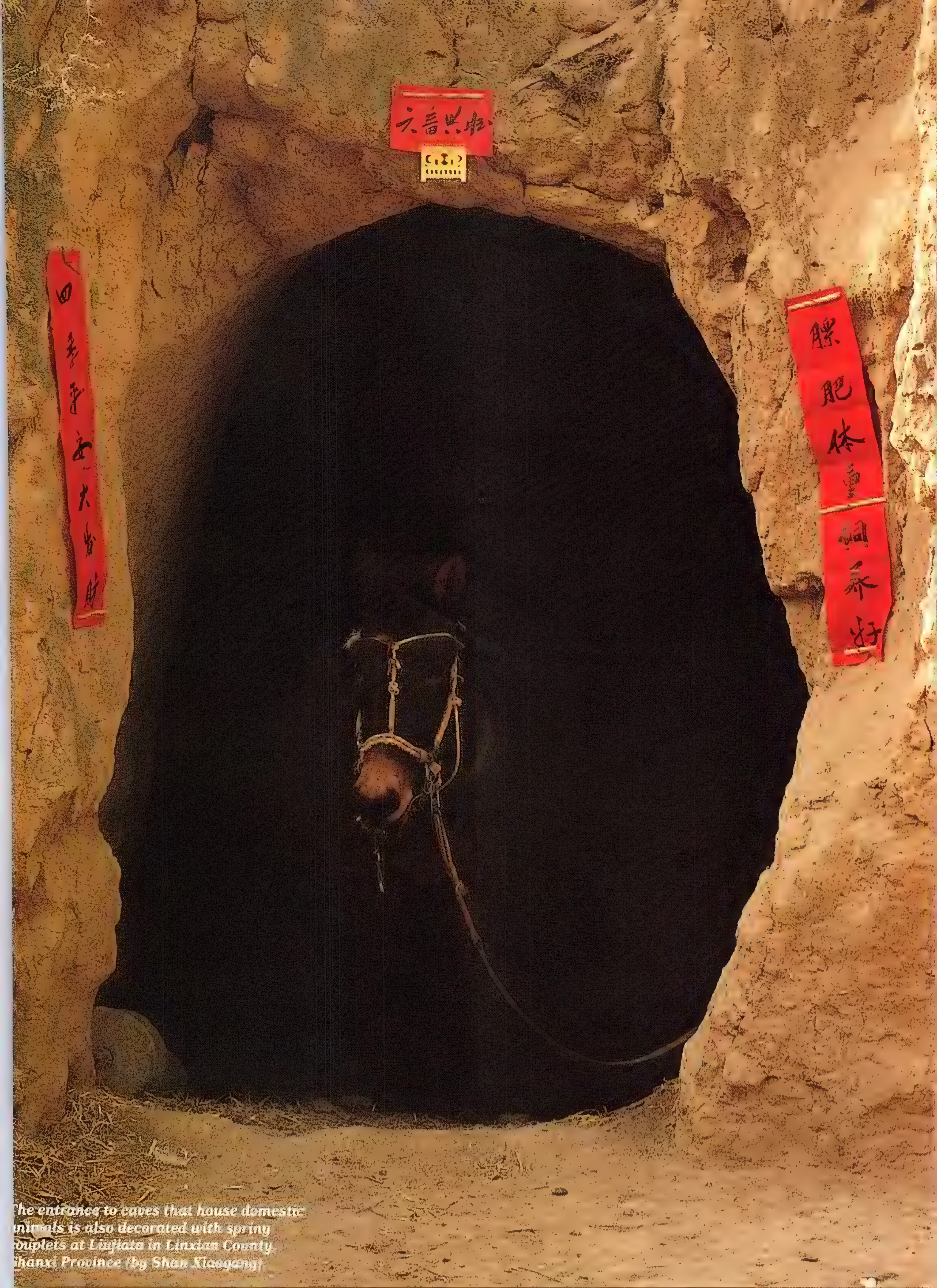
Since the spring couplets express people' best wishes for the coming year, putting them up is a serious job that requires painstaking care (by Shen Yantai).



he entrance to caves that house domestic nimals is also decorated with spring ouplets at Liujiata in Linxian County, hanxi Province (by Shan Xiaogang)

Farmers in suburban Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province buy new furniture and home appliances as part of their New Year activities (by Xie Guanghui).

To celebrate the Spring Festival, every family in rural Shexian County in Hebei Province hangs up their home-made lanterns outside the doors of their houses (by Feng Chengqing).

Hui'an women in Fujian Province are buying cloth for making their unique and traditional style clothes to wear during the Spring Festival (by Shangguan Zhonghua).

福
□芳春千枝秀
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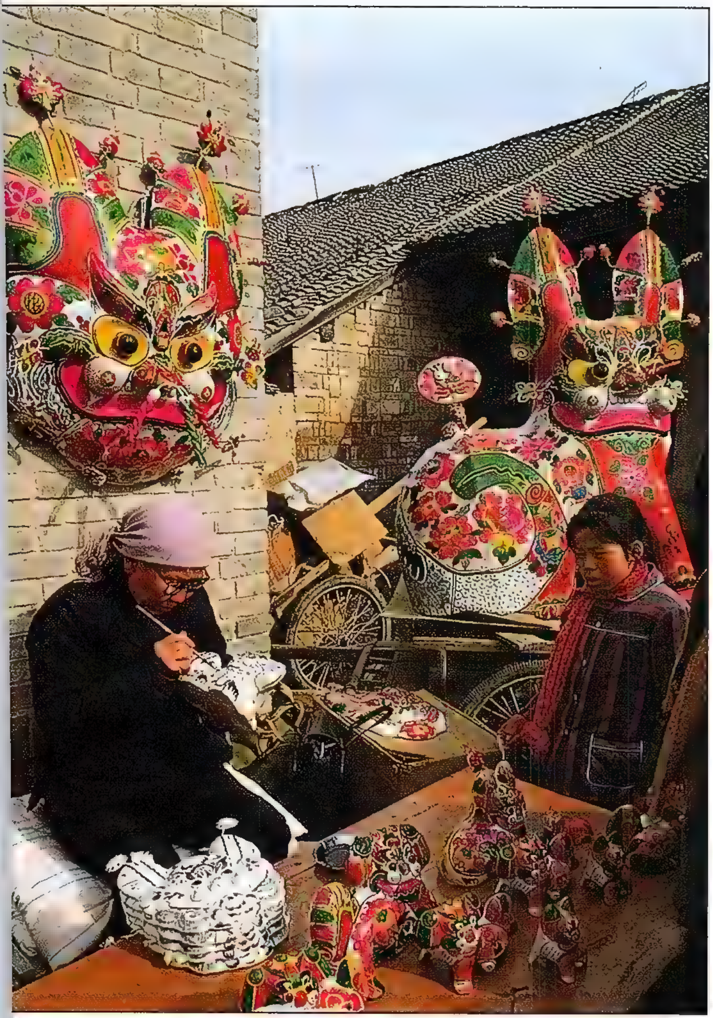
The gates to every house in rural Jinhua in Zhejiang are decorated with red couplets during the Spring Festival (by Song Mingliang).

Women of the Tujia nationality from Laifeng County in western Hubei wash all their clothing clean before New Year's Day. They do so much washing that they have to dry them in a large area such as on the river bank (by Xu Tiezheng).

Before the arrival of the Spring Festival, many folk craftsmen at Renjiapan Village, Jiaxian in northern Shaanxi are always busy making firecrackers. Apart from using them for their own celebrations during the festival, they also sell them at the market (by Chao Xiwen).

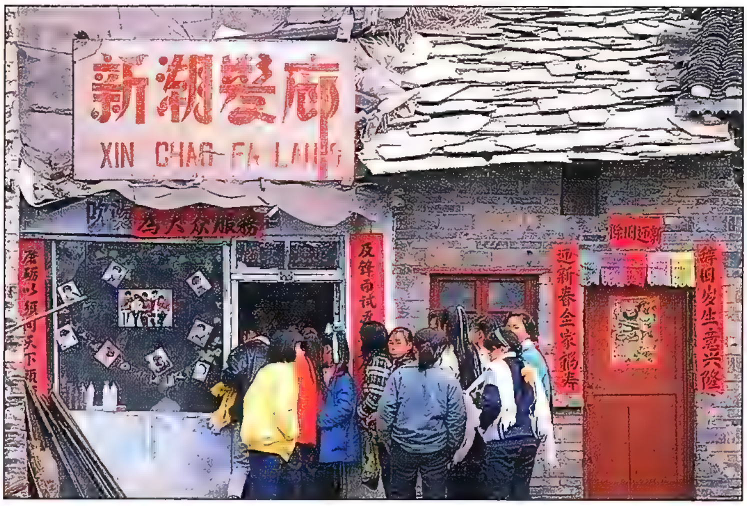
The city of Guangzhou has the reputation of the "city of flowers", since almost all families cultivate flowers. Guangzhou residents always buy fresh flowers at the New Year's Eve Flower Market (by Liang Binglin).

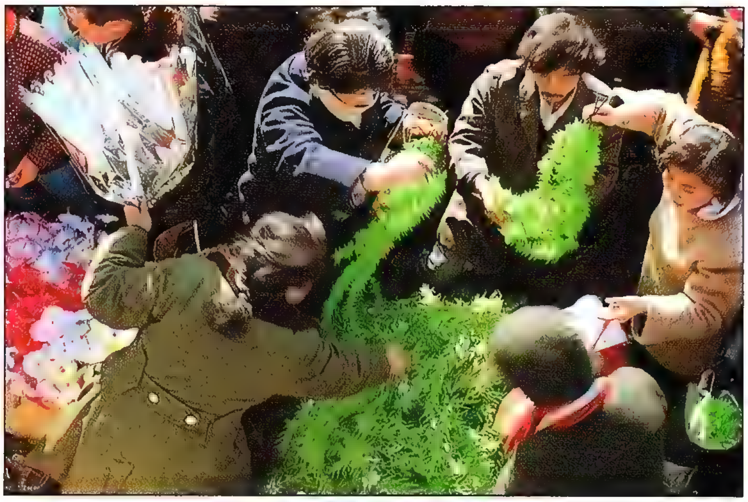
Hundred of Spring Festival couplets give hope of a happier future to the people of Qingdao, Shandong (by Lin Qinli).



A folk artist from Liuying, Fengxiang County in Shaanxi is naking clay toys using skills handed down by his ancestors. n the past, such objects were burial objects but nowadays hey serve as mascots for Spring Festival celebrations (by Iou Dengke).

At the mountainous village of Machang Town, Pingba in Guizhou Province, the first place young girls visit at the New Year market is the beauty parlour (by Li Shixiong).





At the Beixing Agricultural Produce Market in Shenyang, Liaoning, stands selling New Year goods are surrounded by interested buyers. As flowers are a symbol of the spring and fresh ones are hard to find in the frigid Northeast, plastic flowers have become a hot item (by Wang Yi).

A Great Cooking Event

Shortly before the Spring Festival, every family gets busy preparing special dishes for the occasion, slaughtering pigs and sheep for the meat.

The Marriage of the Jade Emperor's Daughter

Preparations for the Spring Festival normally begin on the 24th day of the twelfth month, and there are specific traditional practices to execute on each day during this period. These practices are said to have originated from legends about the wife of the Kitchen God.

The Jade Emperor's daughter was intelligent and kind-hearted. She fell in love with a young man who lived off of taking care of the kitchen and cooking for other people. Enraged by his daughter's insistence on marrying a poor man of the secular world, the emperor punished her by sending her to the human world. The empress who loved her daughter very much kept begging her husband to be lenient. Reluctantly, the emperor conferred on his pauper son-in-law the title of the Kitchen God and the emperor's daughter became the Kitchen God's wife.

Aware of the suffering caused by poverty, the Kitchen God's wife, after her return visits to the heavenly palace, often brought back and distributed food and drinks among the folks. The Jade Emperor who never liked his son-in-law to begin with because of his poverty was even more angered by his daughter's taking food away from the palace. His reaction was to decree that she was allowed only one home visit at the end of each year.

Procedure of Food Preparation

As the New Year's Day drew near, many people had nothing to eat. The Kitchen God's wife was distressed and resolved that on the 23rd day of the twelfth month that when she went on her annual home visit, she would find a way to bring back food for the common folks. Since she had no food at all in her own home, what would she eat on her way to the heavenly palace? The folks then baked some wheat flour cakes for her. She reported the sufferings of the people on earth to her father, the Jade Emperor, who showed no sympathy whatsoever. Instead, he was put off by what he called the air of poverty she had brought home and urged her to go back to the secular world.

The Kitchen God's wife was so angry that she wanted to take leave at once. After second thoughts, however, she felt that she could not face her folks if she went back empty-handed like this. So she came up with a pretext, saying: "I'm not leaving. Tomorrow I will make a long-handled broom."

After she had finished making the broom on the following day, the 24th day of the month, the Kitchen God's wife was again requested to return to the world. "Let's not rush," she said. "The New Year is approaching, and I have yet to prepare beancurd for the festival. Tomorrow I must make some beancurd."

On the 25th day, while she was engaged in making beancurd, her father came again and demanded her to quit. "Don't hurry me," she responded. "I don't have any meat at home. Tomorrow I will go out to get some meat."

When she came back with meat on the 26th day, the Jade Emperor appeared again and told her to leave the following day. "Please don't rush me, Father," his daughter begged. 'I'm too poor to afford to raise chickens at home. Tomorrow I will slaughter one here to bring home."

In the midst of plucking a chicken on the 27th day, her imperial father entered the kitchen. Before he could get the words out, she pleaded, "Don't hurry me. I have to prepare some food for my way back home. Tomorrow I will leaven dough and steam buns."

On the 28th day, during her work around the kitchen range, she heard her father's footsteps approaching again. "Father! Please don't rush me!" she said loudly. "We cannot do without wine on New Year's Day, can we? Tomorrow I must buy some wine."

As soon as she came back with the wine on the 29th day, the Jade Emperor stepped in. She tried again to stall her father's demand while cooking up another excuse. "My family does not have the opportunity to enjoy a meal of dumplings for the whole year. Tomorrow I need to make some dumplings."

On the 30th day of the twelfth month, the Jade Emperor ordered his daughter to go back to her own home that very day. His daughter, who was making dumplings at that time, decided that she had at last collected enough foodstuffs. This time she quietly left the heavenly palace.

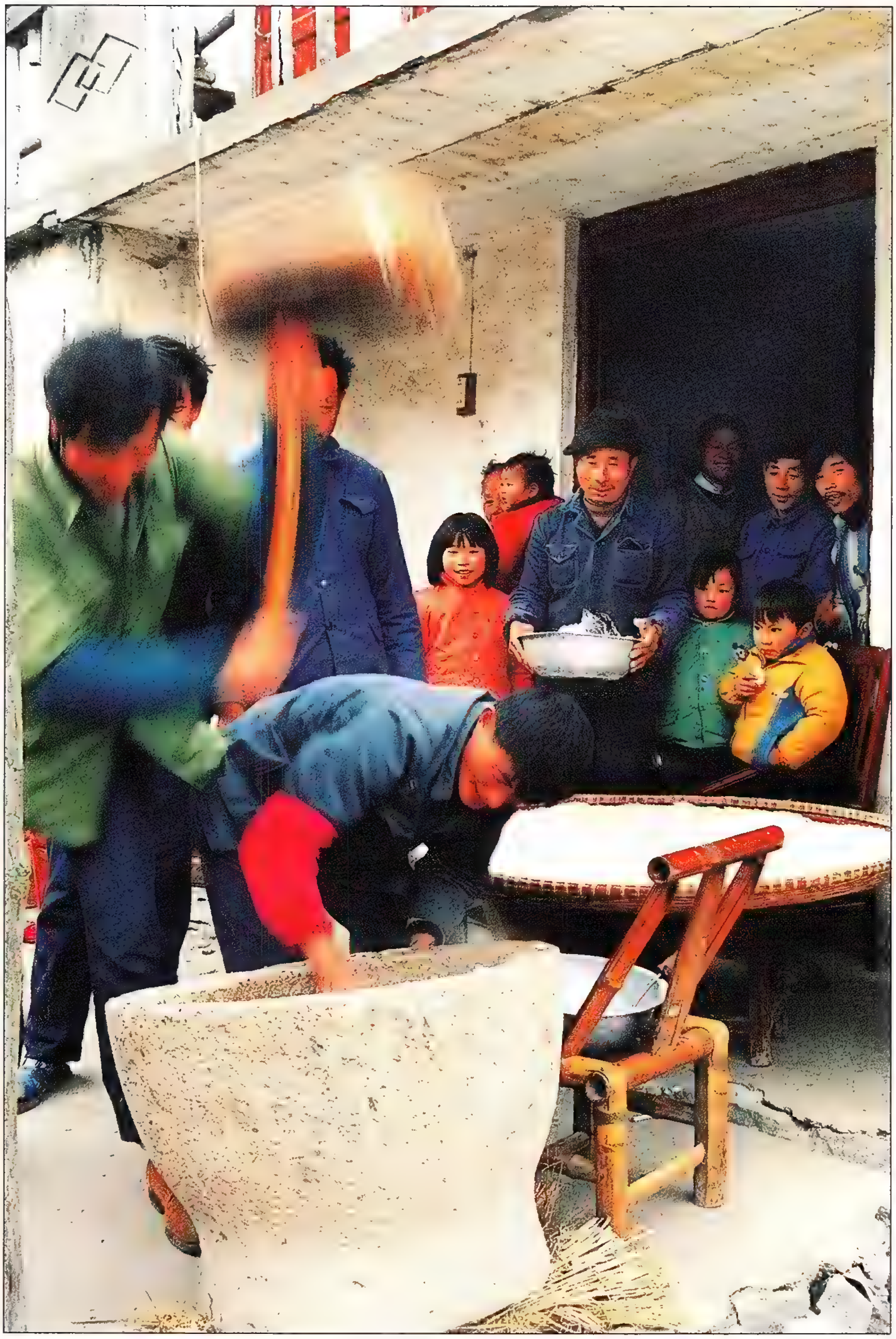
To commemorate the Kitchen God's wife who had brought them food, people began the following day-by-day schedule of making pancakes on the 23rd day of the twelfth month, cleaning the house on the 24th, making beancurd on the 25th, killing pigs or slaughtering sheep for meat on the 26th, killing and dressing chickens and ducks on the 27th, fermenting wheat flour dough for steamed buns on the 28th, buying liquor on the 29th and making dumplings on the 30th.

Of course the above tale is only a legend and is not the factual basis of this tradition. In actuality, it is a custom which is the product of an agricultural civilization that has evolved over thousands of years.

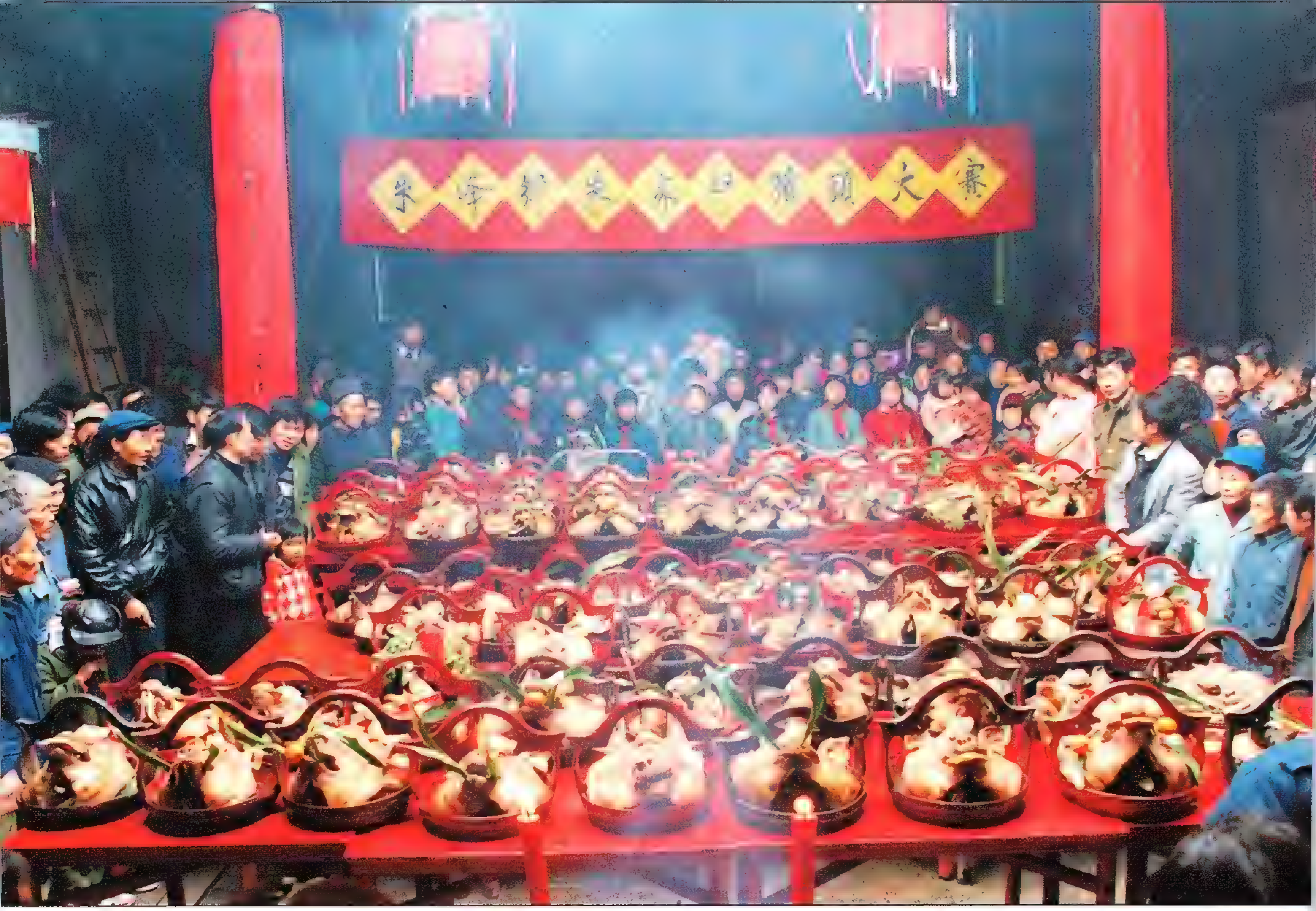
The quality of harvests being determined by factors outside the control of individual farmers or even the society as a whole, inevitably there would be years when the harvest was abundant and other years when there were slim pickings. "To store grain in the event of famine" has been wise advice passed down through the ages to motivate people to be frugal in times of plenty.

Enjoyment of good food is a pleasure that everyone can appreciate and has always been a highlight of the Spring Festival. After bumper harvests, people could always enjoy a cornucopia of culinary delights during the Spring Festival. Sumptuous dishes served during this time are the actual blessings of the past and also symbolize the promise of a prosperous future.

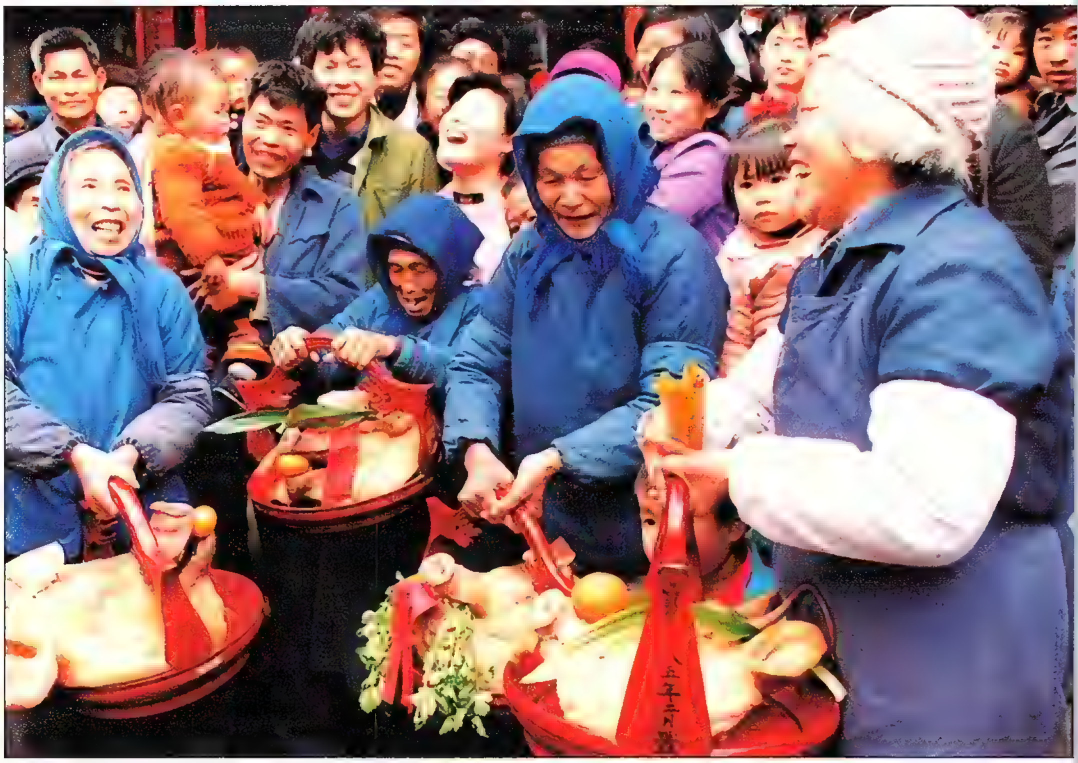
Poultry, livestock and even expensive delicacies from land and sea are gathered and prepared for the occasion. Cereal foods are specially made ready for the festival and, in fact, are known as New Year's foods. In the past, home-brewed liquor was an indispensable beverage at the New Year's feast. Now, of course, most people no longer have the facilities to ferment and distill alcoholic beverages. Various fruits and snacks complement the festive fare and colourfully packaged New Year's gifts provide visual garnishings for this most important festival.



During the twelfth lunar month, farmers in Shaoxing, Zhejiang use traditional stone mortar and wooden pestles to prepare cakes with glutinous rice flour. It is said that the cakes made in this way are the smoothest, softest and tastiest (by Chen Xin).

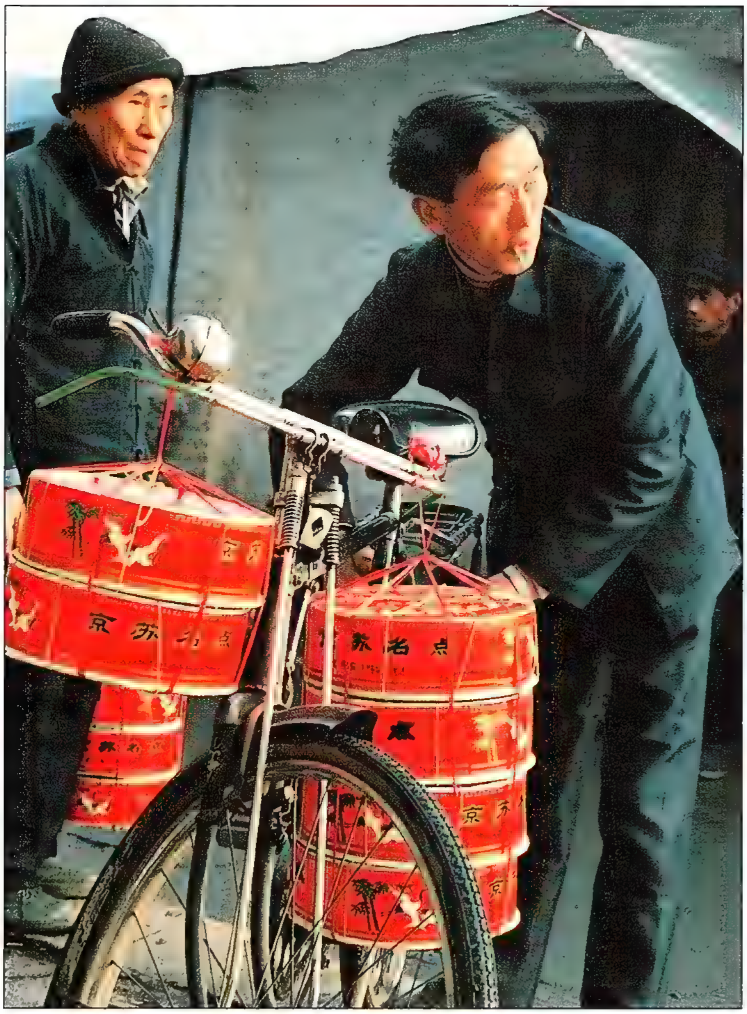


Residents from Zhujia Village, Zhufeng Township, Chun'an County in Zhejiang Province once used pig's heads as sacrificial offerings to gods during their prayers. Nowadays, they hold pig's head competitions to see who has raised the biggest pig (by Wu Zongqi).



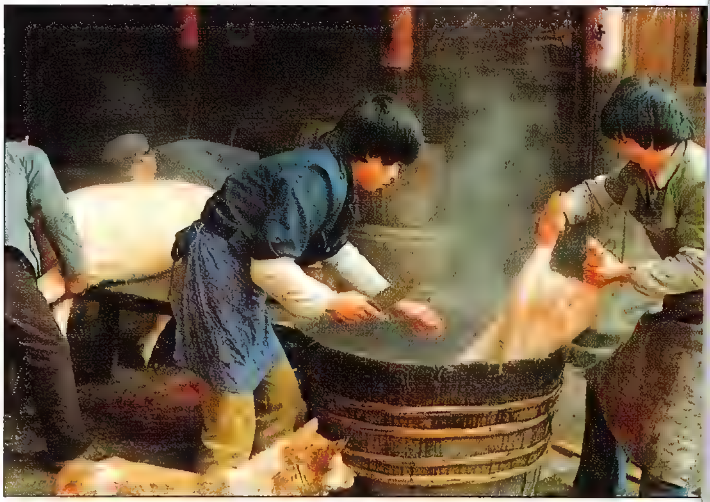
On New Year's Eve, every family in Donggezhuang, Rushan County, Shandong Province is making big and soft steamed bread, customarily called "gold ingots" (a form of currency once used in ancient China). It is believed that eating them will bring good luck and good fortune (by Sun Jianzhong).

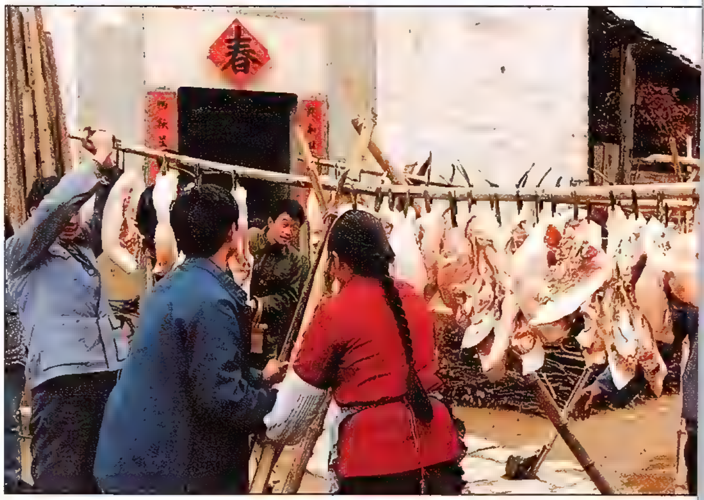
Housewives in Shanxi make a local delicacy called "cat's ear" during the Spring Festival (by Shan Xiaogang).



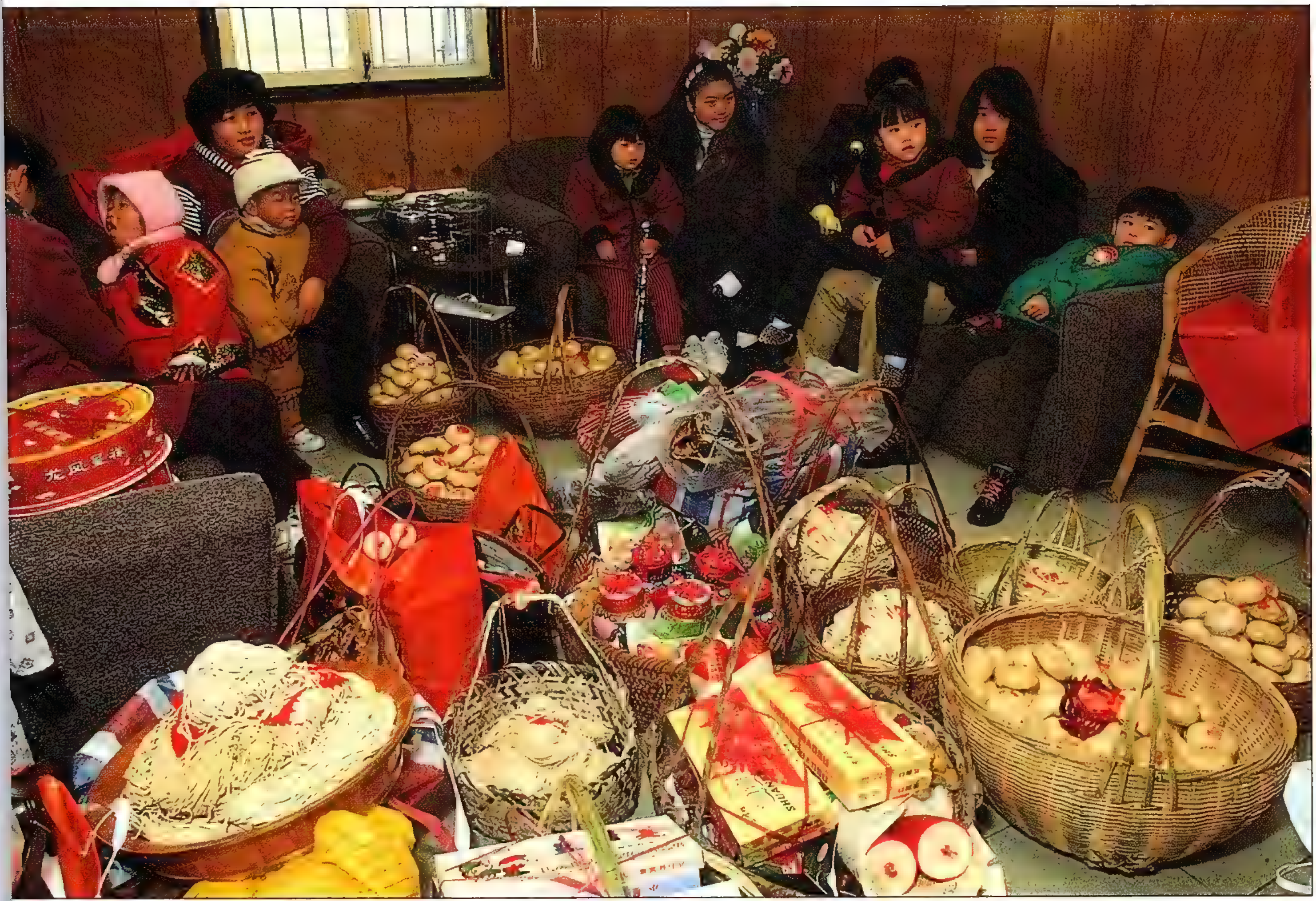
It is a custom for farmers in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province to visit relatives during the Spring Festival. This family is gathering together gifts to take to their relatives on such a visit (by Chen Xiao).

On the nineteenth day of the twelfth lunar month, villagers from Lishui, Zhejiang, whose income mostly comes from raising pigs, slaughter pigs in preparation for the Spring Festival (by Lin Yongle).





Farmers of Shexian in Anhui Province prepare salted meat and cured meat for the Spring Festival. At least 100 to 600 kilogrammes of meat hang outside every house (by Du Jianping).



These birthday gifts suggest what an elaborate birthday party that this family in Shaoxing, Zhejiang has celebrated during the Spring Festival for the elder in the family (by Xie Guanghui).

Stories of the Kitchen God

Who really is the Kitchen God? In folk tales, there are various conceptions of the Kitchen God, some singing his praises, and yet others telling how bad he is. Apart from the story of the Kitchen God who is described as the good son-in-law of the Jade Emperor, most of the stories pin-point him as a bad guy.

The Dreaded Spy from Heaven

As the Kitchen God was the official sent down by the heavenly palace to each and every home, he knew every secret in every family. What made this a misfortune was that he loved to meddle in others' affairs and often went to the Jade Emperor to speak ill of the people on earth. It was on the basis of his bad reports that the heavenly ruler arranged disasters and misfortunes for people. Naturally people were very much afraid of the Kitchen God since they believed their destiny was in his hands.

However, no matter how cautious they were, inevitably the god could find them wrong one way or the other. So people decided to make sacrifices on the 23rd day of the twelfth month just before the Kitchen God went to make his report to Jade Emperor. Every family, rich or poor alike, prepared sedan chairs to carry the Kitchen God and his wife to heaven. The sacrifices they offered to the god, apart from wine and food, also included "sugar tea" to sweeten his mouth so that he would say nice things in front of Jade Emperor. This way, people could avoid disasters brought onto them by the ill news of the Kitchen God.

Zhang Sheng and His Two Marriages

In Shandong Province, the story about the Kitchen God goes as follows.

A long, long time ago, a wealthy man called Zhang Sheng married a pretty woman named Guo Dingxiang. Soon, Zhang Sheng grew tired of his wife and married another beauty, Li Haitang, who forced Zhang Sheng to divorce and chase away his first wife.

Zhang Sheng and his second wife, who was fond of eating and averse to do any work, played and enjoyed themselves day in and day out. Within less than two years, they spent every penny he had. Li Haitang was compelled to marry somebody else and Zhang Sheng went on begging along the street. On one windy and snowy day, Zhang Sheng fainted outside a house because of hunger and cold. A maid of the house owner helped him into the house and fed him a warm meal.

Soon the housewife came out to see him. He looked up and it was no other than his first wife Guo Dingxiang. Extremely ashamed of himself and finding no place to hide, he crawled into the kitchen fireplace.

When Guo Dingxiang realized who it was, she pulled him out, only to find that he had already been burned to a crisp. Deeply saddened, she soon died too.

On the grounds that Zhang Sheng at the end came to see his own mistake, the Jade Emperor designated him as the Kitchen God and Guo Dingxiang, as the Kitchen God's wife. This is why many woodblock print pictures put the portraits of both the Kitchen God and his wife together as gods for people to show their reverence.

A Lazybones and an Opium Addict

In folktales circulating in Guangdong, the Kitchen God had a personal history of being slothful and an opium addict. According to the story, there once lived a very lazy person named Zhang whose whole family lived on the odd jobs done by his wife. One day before New Year's Day, he was sent by his wife to get food from her maternal family. Carrying back a sack of rice, Zhang found it too heavy and gave it to a beggar he ran into half way before he reached home. He did not know that by giving the sack of rice away, he also gave away the silver ingot his mother-in-law put underneath the rice.

When his wife learned what had happened, she was so enraged that she picked up a poker and hit her husband. Unexpectedly, he died from the beating. Because of the custom of not having a funeral before New Year's Day, she buried him under the kitchen stove and put on top of the stove a memorial tablet for him and now referred to him as Lord of the Kitchen.

Surprisingly, her family became wealthy. People who did not know the real story of the family simply imitated her in making sacrifices to the stove. Since then it has become a custom to offer sacrifices to the Kitchen God.

The tale about his opium addiction says that the guy was only good at eating and refused to do anything else. As he so badly needed money to buy the drug, he even sold his wife to a rich man. Later he spent all of this money as well and was reduced to being a beggar in the street. Often he would ask his ex-wife for money. One Spring Festival, he died in front of the kitchen of his ex-wife. She then put his memorial tablet on the stove and offered sacrifices to his tablet, calling him Lord of the Kitchen. This gradually gave rise to the tradition of making sacrifices to the Kitchen God.

The Corrupt Official

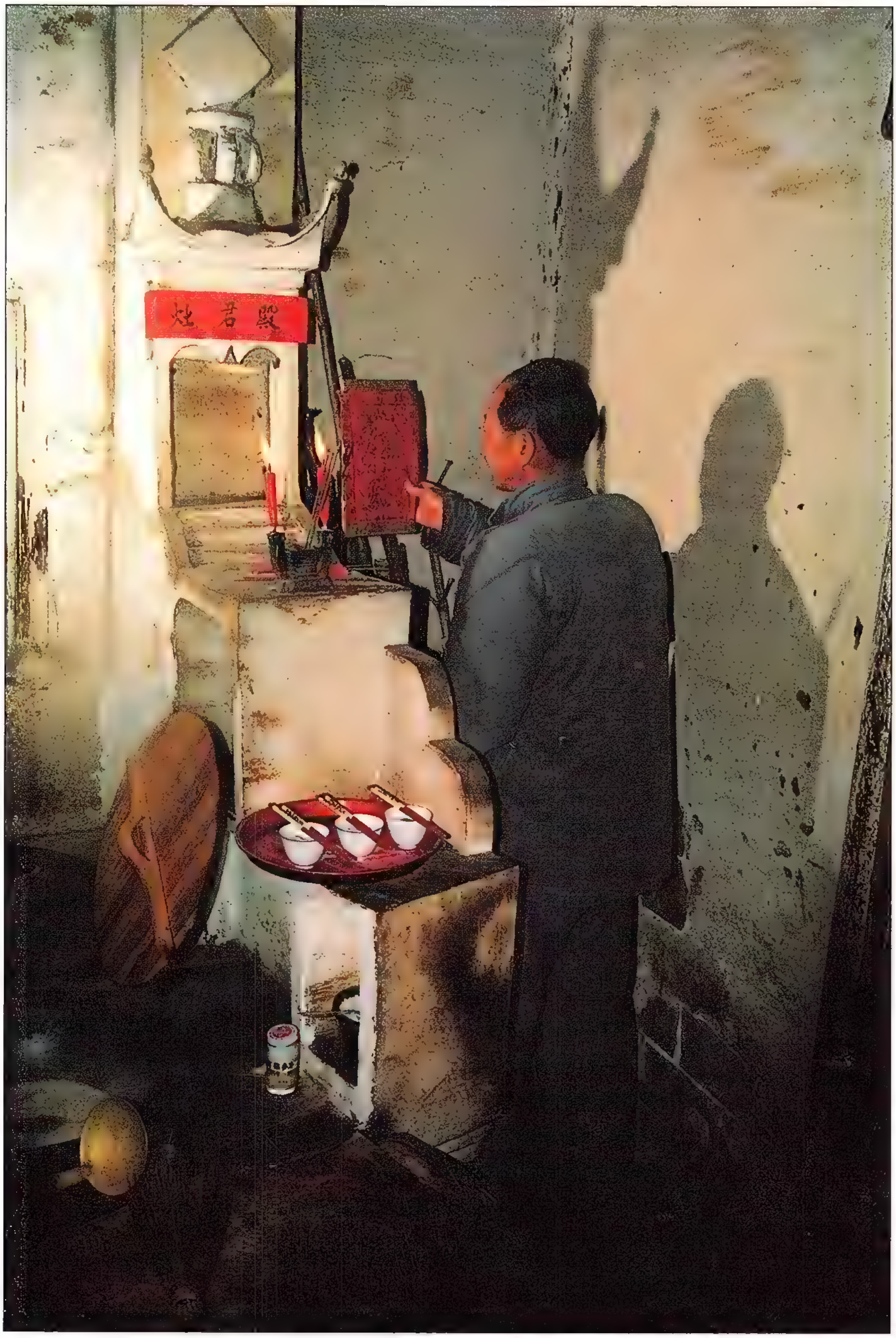
In Hebei Province, there is yet another tale about the origin of the Kitchen God. It is said that a high-ranking official was sent by the emperor to be the governor of Pingyuan Prefecture. The official was not interested in the job, so the emperor ordered that the residents in Pingyuan in turn invite the newly appointed prefectural governor to nice meals at their home. Those who refused to do so would be beheaded.

At first the governor went to the banquets by himself. Later he took along his whole family or even his pet chickens and dogs. People suffered and complained, as their food supplies dwindled.

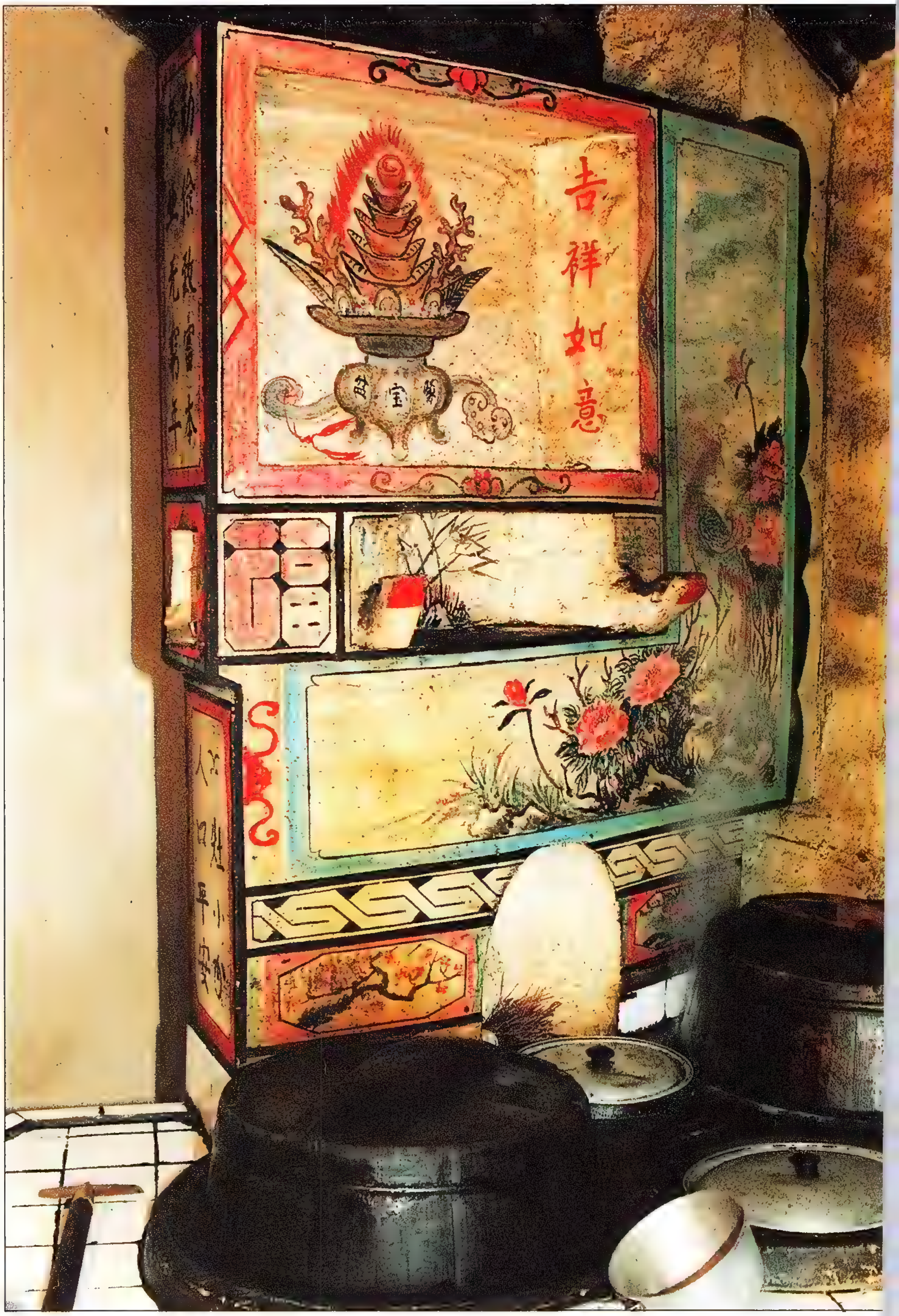
A butcher surnamed Zhang who was well versed in the martial arts wanted to get rid of the corrupt governor for the benefit of the residents. On day he lured the corrupt official to his home and with one slap on the face, beat him to death on the wall of the kitchen.

The emperor remarked that since the official once served as an imperial cook, he would confer on him the title of the Kitchen God. The supreme ruler also ordered that the official's portrait should be hung on the kitchen wall of every family so that his memory would endure. Thus, according to this story, the custom of making sacrifices to the Kitchen God commenced.

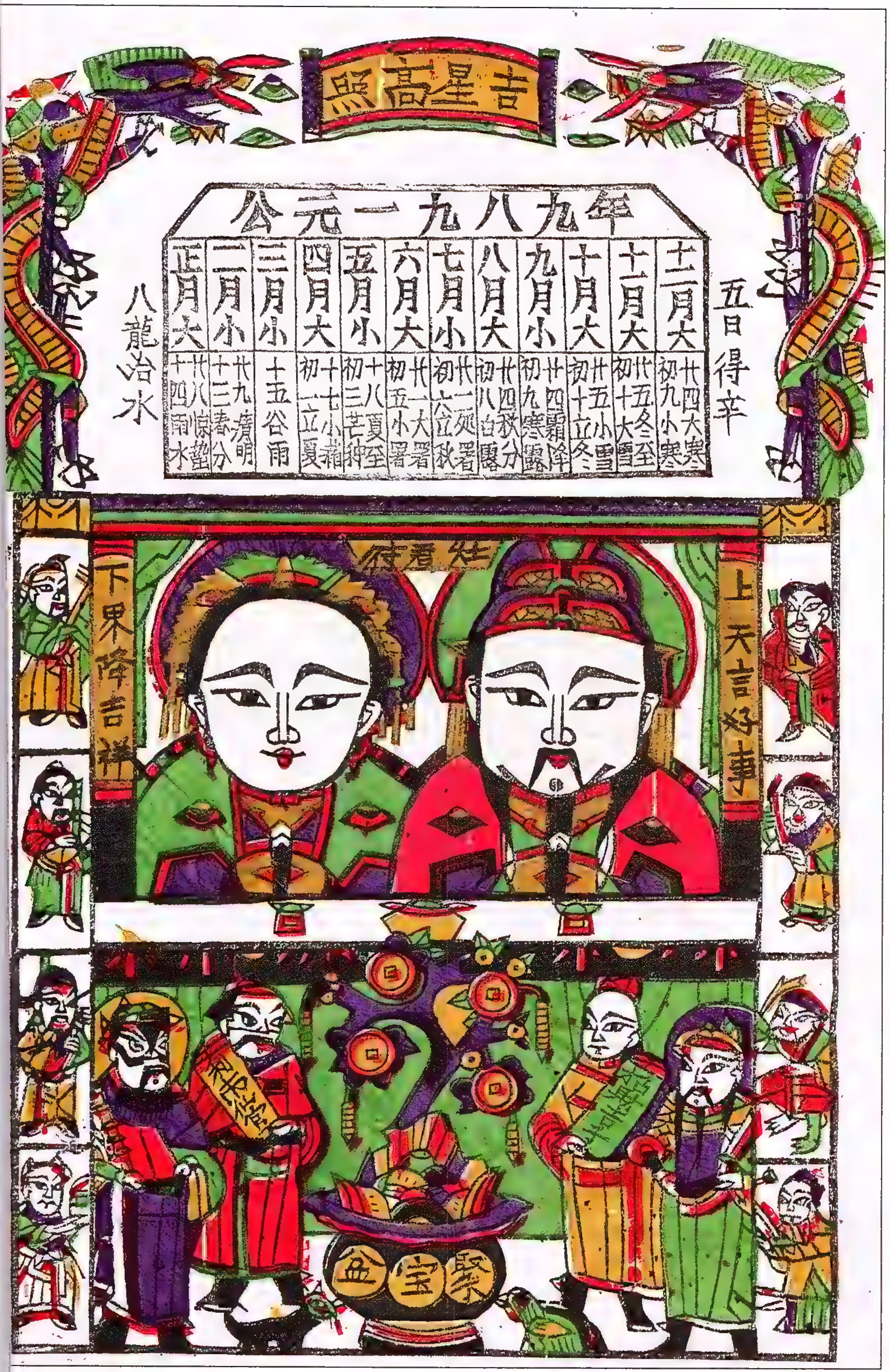
Translated by Huang Youyi



The 23rd day of the twelfth month is said to be the day when the Kitchen God goes to the Heavenly Palace to report the old year's events in the human realm. People therefore offer a farewell party for the god offering various kinds of stuffed dumplings made with glutinous rice flour served in soup and other cakes and delicacies (by Bian Dianfu).



People inhabiting Shanghai, and Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces greatly appreciate their cooking range. The picture above it shown here insures peace, safety and good fortune during the coming year (by Ye Wenhu).


吉星高照
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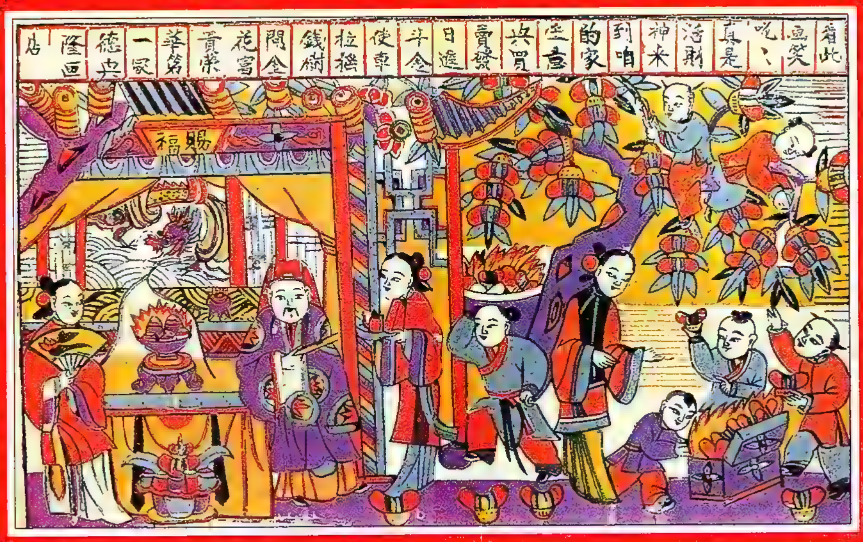
十月大 廿五小雪 初十立冬
九月小 廿四霜降 初九寒露
八月大 廿四秋分 初八白露
七月小 廿一处暑 初六立秋
六月大 廿一大暑 初五小暑
五月小 十八夏至 初三芒种
四月大 十七小满 初一立夏
三月小 十五谷雨
二月小 廿九清明 十三春分
正月大 廿八惊蛰 十四雨水
八龍治水
灶君府
上天言好事
下界降吉祥
聚宝盆

The Kitchen God and his wife as depicted on the Yangjiabu New Year picture of Shandong. Before the end of each year, people replace the old picture with a new one on which the farmers can obtain information about the solar terms pertinent to the coming year.



看此畫笑吃、真是活財神來到咱的家生意兴買賣發日進斗金使車拉搖錢樹開金花富貴榮華第一家德兴隆画店
賜福

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

After busy preparations starting from the beginning of the twelfth month of the lunar year, everything is now ready for the celebration of the New Year, which is approaching ever more quickly after the 24th day of the month. The elderly eagerly await the family reunion and the family reunion dinner; children wait for firecrackers and New Year gifts; gods and ancestors anticipate sacrificial offerings; and brides long for the wedding procession which will take them to their bridegroom's home amidst the sound of gongs and drums. Everyone looks forward to the arrival of the traditional festival.

New Year's Eve marks the conclusion of a year's hard work. This is the time when people bid farewell to the old year and welcome in the new. New Year's Day marks the beginning of a new year. Since ancient times people have regarded New Year as an important event and each year have held grand celebrations.

When the time to replace the old with the new has at last arrived, people usually hold many sacrificial activities to lament the passing of time and to express their desire for a more prosperous future. When they bid farewell to the old year, they hope bad luck and misfortune will be left behind; when they welcome in the new year, they wish for a happier year ahead.

Usually, New Year's Eve is the busiest day of the year. Within one day people must finish all the work that it is taboo to do in the following days such as the slaughtering of pigs and cattle, replacing the old with the new, cleaning the house and all the other jobs that need to be done with knives and scissors. Most importantly, the family reunion dinner must be well prepared. For this is an auspicious and the most sumptuous meal of the year, and part of the food must be left over for the coming year, which symbolizes that the family has food enough and to spare from year to year. Such a bountiful feast is known as the "Crossing-the-Year Meal". When the meal is prepared, the food is first used as a sacrificial offering to the gods and ancestors.

In northern China the family reunion dinner includes *jiaozi* (dumplings), which suggest that the new year replaces the old at midnight. Some of the dumplings are eaten at dinner, and some are left for midnight. At midnight as the time shifts from the old year to the new, every household starts to boil dumplings, adding a lively atmosphere to the changing of the year. (*jiaozi* is a homonym of "crossing *zishi*" in Chinese, *zishi* being the period of the day from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m.)

After dinner the whole family sits together around a stove, staying up the whole night, sending off the old year and welcoming in the new. This is the traditional *Shousui* (staying up all night on New Year's Eve).

During this night, the family enjoys a kind of wine called Tusu Wine. Usually, young people drink first and old people second, because young people are considered to gain a year in age, while old people have passed another year on the wane. The Tusu Wine may be real wine, or may be water added to Tusu Medicine used to treat disease. Legend has it that in ancient times, there was a strange man who lived in a house called Tusu. On every New Year's Eve he sent a packet of medicinal herbs to his neighbours and asked them to put them into their wells. After they drank the water from the well on New Year's Day, they would not fall ill the whole year round. Later, people simply called the man and his medicine Tusu. As time went by, Tusu Wine became a symbol for the changing of the year.

At midnight, after the tolling of the bell for the new year, every household begins to set off firecrackers, and people greet each other with auspicious words, merrily welcoming the arrival of the new year.

The first day of the lunar new year is the quietest and is characterized by great caution in word as well as action. As everything has been done at the end of the old year, people now all feel relieved and light-hearted. Their spirits having been lifted, they will enjoy a good start to the beginning of the new year. However, there are many taboos on New Year's Day, so everyone has to be very careful.

Conventions and taboos vary greatly from place to place. But there are some common ones: on New Year's Day no one is allowed to sweep the floor or throw water, for the sweeping and throwing motion might take good fortune away with it; from the first to the fifth day of the new year, no one is allowed to tip out rubbish if one wishes to accumulate wealth; at the same time no one is allowed to touch any scissors or needles, for it might hurt the fingers; no one is allowed to speak inauspicious words, and everyone must talk about nice things. A sign on red paper saying "Children's words are beyond the taboos" is put up in the house lest children say anything wrong. The whole family must maintain good terms with each other; no one is allowed to beat anyone or swear at anyone. No money is spent on New Year's Day. People say this way can help one to build up good fortune.

On New Year's Day women must not go out to pay New Year calls; they must wait until the following day. If the first visitor a family receives on New Year's Day is a woman, it is regarded as a bad omen for the family.

No one is allowed to do any slaughtering or use a knife on New Year's Day, as the knife is a lethal weapon. It is decidedly inauspicious to use it. No funeral arrangements may be made on New Year's Day. If you receive an obituary notice you must tear off one of its corners to ward off bad luck. If anyone dies of illness on New Year's Day, you must tell a white lie, saying that he died on the following day.

All of these taboos are initiated in order to get the new year off to an auspicious start. Moreover, they also have the purpose of enhancing the happy atmosphere of the festival. But for housewives who do chores day in and day out the whole year round, the net result of these taboos provides a chance for them to take a longer rest.

Generally, people stay indoors on New Year's Day. But in some places people do not follow these rules. They leave their houses to pay New Year calls, visiting one household after another, thus commencing their busiest period of social activities during the year.

Happy Reunion of Every Family

Family Reunion

To the Chinese people, the New Year is the time for the reunion of the whole family. Particularly from New Year's Eve to the morning of New Year's Day, everyone stays at home to enjoy the happy family reunion atmosphere. This has become an established principle which is followed by one and all. Even those who work far away from home try to rush back as quickly as they can no matter how long the distance is. In the period leading up to the New Year, land, water and air transportation are extremely busy throughout China. But as soon as New Year arrives, the situation abruptly changes; it becomes very quiet, very few passengers are to be found on the buses, boats and planes. This distinct rising and ebbing tide of humanity has become an annual phenomenon in China.

People everywhere hasten back home for the same purpose — to join in the family reunion dinner. Since the dinner is the symbol of the family reunion, if anyone fails to attend the dinner because of illness or some other reasons, the family will leave a seat with a bowl and a pair of chopsticks for him at the dining table, and he will become the topic of conversation for the family when they stay up through the night.

At New Year, people prepare many kinds of food with a round shape (the words for "round" and "reunion" are phonetically the same in Chinese), such as meat balls, fish balls, stuffed dumplings made of glutinous rice flour (mostly eaten at Lantern Festival on the 15th day of the first lunar month), fried cakes and fried glutinous-rice balls. Even dumplings made at New Year's Eve are semi-circular. The Lantern Festival, the final high tide of New Year, takes place on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month when the moon is full.

New Year Sacrifice

People's sense of reunion also finds expression in the sacrifices made before the start of the family reunion dinner in New Year's Eve.

New Year's Eve is said to be the time all the gods descend to the world of man. Families with a long tradition perform specific actions to receive gods at home. They burn incense and paper, offer food and kowtow to pay their respects to the gods and to their own ancestors. The burning of joss-sticks and paper also symbolizes the continuation of the family line.

In some places, when people make New Year sacrifices, they take out their ancestors' portraits and place them in their ancestral temples to worship and to offer up sacrifices. Thus the ancestors and their descendants gather together to celebrate New Year. Only after a memorial ceremony is held for the ancestors would people finally start their family reunion dinner, eating their fill and drinking to their heart's content.

Auspicious New Year's Eve Dinner

At the end of the lunar year every household prepares a sumptuous meal, which is known as "The Family Reunion Dinner" or "Sharing the Year" meaning that all members of the family share the bountiful harvest for the year. When the dinner starts, they first remove the sacrificial offerings from the table, but keep the dishes there and then sit around the table to enjoy the meal.

While eating the grand dinner, certain rules must be strictly obeyed. For example, the seats must be allocated according to seniority, and while eating at the table, everyone must guard against dropping any tableware or uttering any words considered inauspicious.

Every dish at the family reunion dinner must be auspicious. Most of the dishes have homophonic names and with meanings denoting good fortune and to meet this requirement different places have different homophonic names for different dishes.

In southern China, there is one essential dish for the family reunion dinner, "Niangao", meaning "an increase in height every year". In some places people eat a dish made of taro, which homophonically means "being rich" and "surplus".

People in Changshu in Jiangsu Province eat a dish known as "Four Hats and One Umbrella" — four hot dishes in the shape of a hat and one chafing dish in the shape of an umbrella. The chafing dish set in the middle of the four hot dishes, plus four cold dishes and a plate of light refreshments, altogether add up to the lucky number "ten".

When people in Yangzhou have their family reunion dinner, they must eat a dish made of pea shoots. People in Beijing have apples as part of their family reunion dinner. The underlying significance of these dishes is to ensure the whole family is well.

In northern Jiangsu, after the family reunion dinner, people ladle out the surplus rice from the cooking pot and put some cypress twigs and gingko on the rice to symbolize that "it is evergreen and fruitful during the four seasons". The rice is taken out, revealing a whole rice crust underneath. The crust resembles a silver ingot. On New Year's Day, they put newly cooked rice and the leftover rice together and give it the auspicious name of "The Silver Ingot Rice".

People in northern China describe dumplings as silver ingots because of the similarity between the shapes of the two objects. But the dumplings made at New Year's Eve are different from those made in ordinary times. For some of them are stuffed on the sly with coins. If anyone bites one of these dumplings, even if it may hurt his teeth, it is considered a good omen, for it is a symbol of good luck in the coming year.

New Year's Red Envelopes for Children

After the reunion dinner, the elder members of the family begin to give gifts of money in small red envelopes to the children. This marks the highlight of the family reunion activities. While grandparents give money to grandchildren, parents to their sons and daughters, uncles to nieces and nephews, and sisters-in-law to their husband's sisters, they exchange greetings, wishing everyone a happy New Year. It is believed that such red envelope money will help children to dispel evil and defeat the strong to help the children to pass unharmed through the New Year.

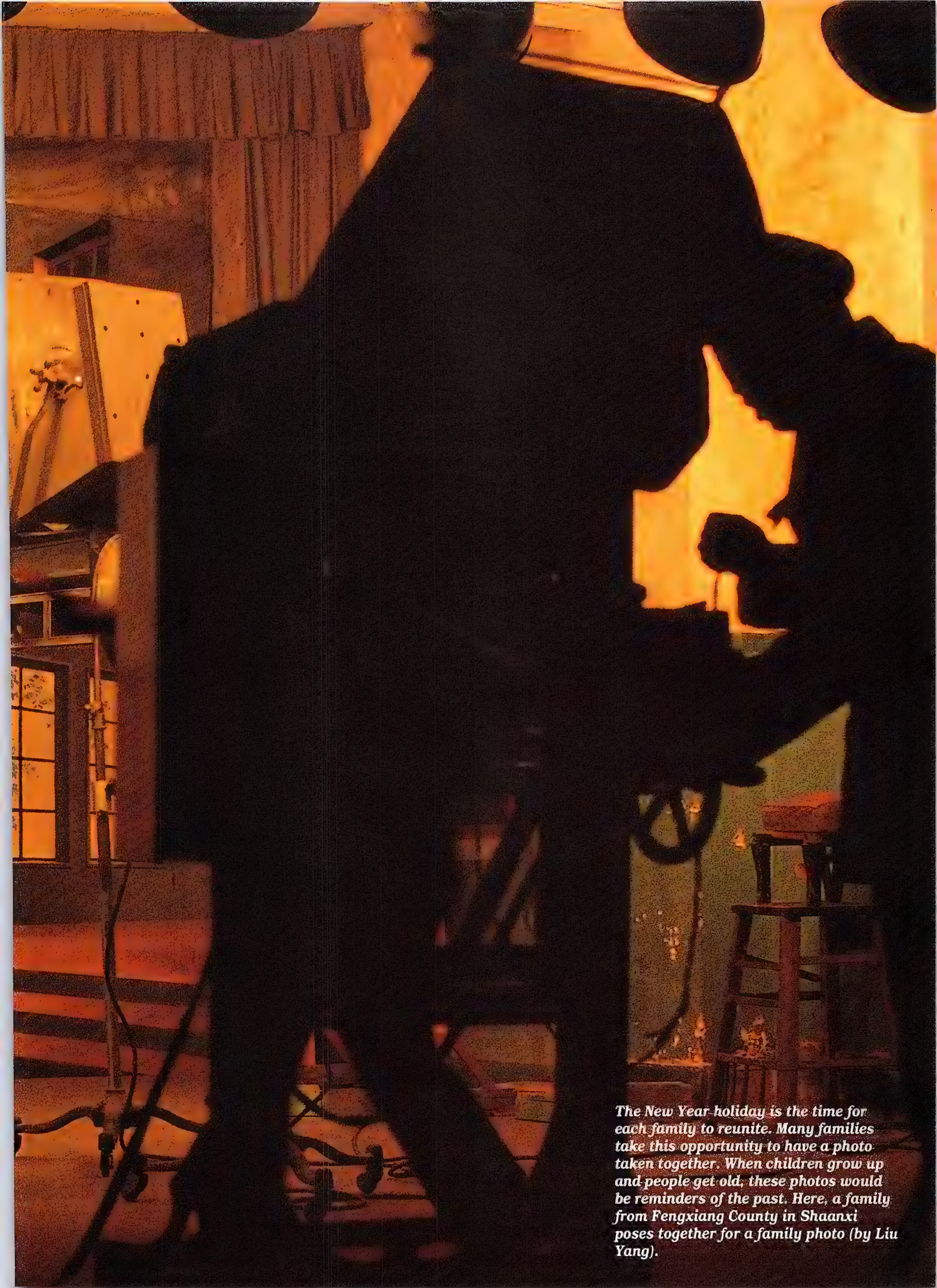
During ancient times people used coloured thread to string copper coins together, and for added good luck would sometimes string together a total of one hundred coins. But nowadays people wrap banknotes in red paper and print auspicious designs and characters on the red wrappers, so as to make the occasion more colourful and lively. The former function of such special money to dispel evil and defeat the strong has been replaced by love and intimacy.

Staying Up All Night on New Year's Eve and Paying New Year's Calls

Then the family members sit together to stay up through the night. In the past most families used to sit around a stove enjoying refreshments while chatting about everything under heaven. But in modern times people sit in front of the TV set or karaoke. At Spring Festival every year, a variety show featuring famous artists and star singers renders excellent performances on television the whole night through. At midnight, as the bell sounds to announce the arrival of New Year, people begin to extend warm greetings first to the elder members of the family and then to each other. The atmosphere is very warm and sincere.

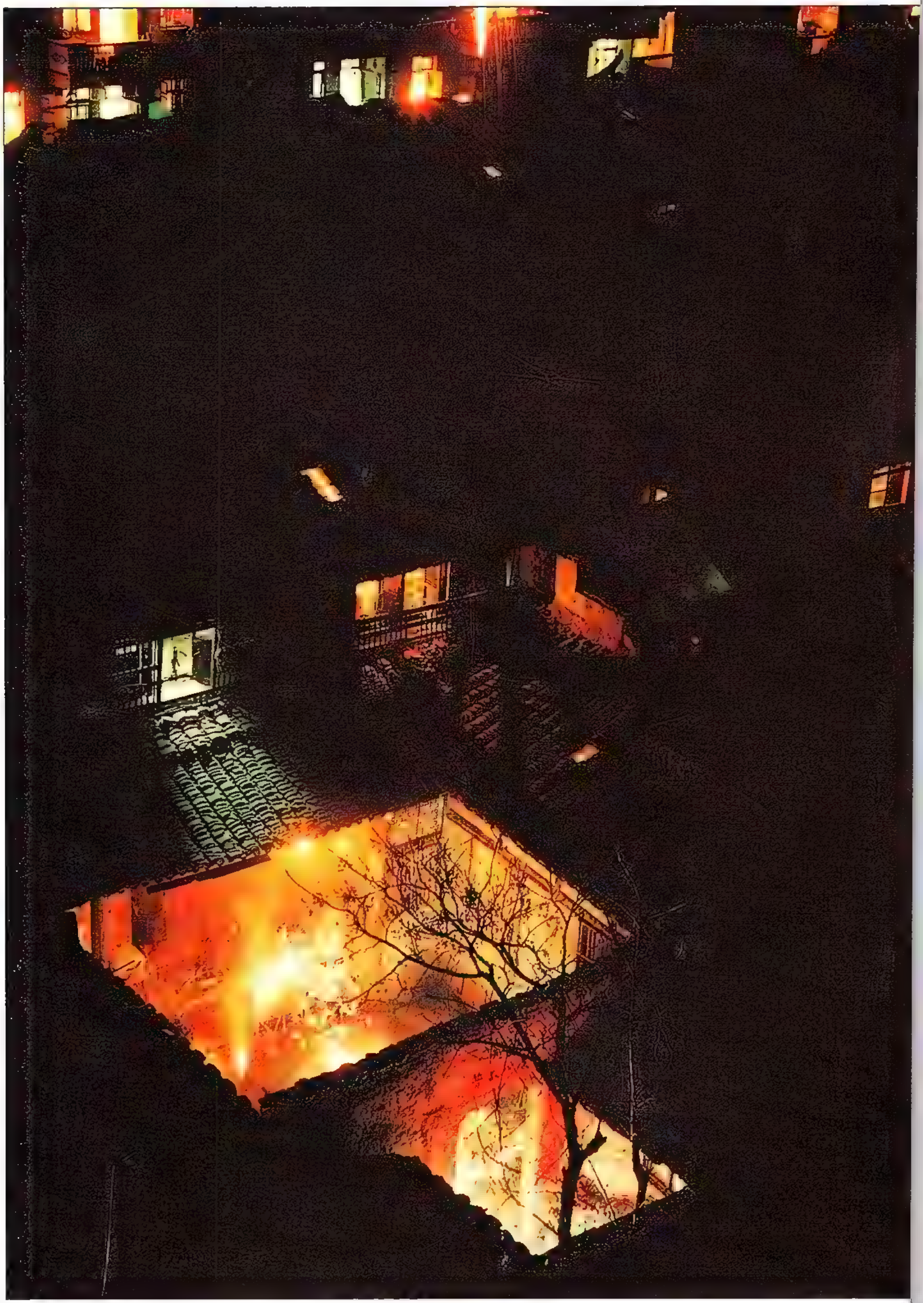
In the countryside every household builds a huge fire in the courtyard that illuminates the place as if it were daytime. This is known as "Building a Fire Pagoda". In the past it was said the purpose of constructing this Fire Pagoda was to drive away the strange beast Nian. But today the fire has simply evolved into a symbol of family prosperity.

People in Northeast China boil dumplings at midnight on New Year's Eve to welcome back the God of Wealth. The dumplings are in the shape of silver ingots, implying a wish to earn a fortune during the new year (by Wang Jiku).



The New Year holiday is the time for each family to reunite. Many families take this opportunity to have a photo taken together. When children grow up and people get old, these photos would be reminders of the past. Here, a family from Fengxiang County in Shaanxi poses together for a family photo (by Liu Yang).

On the eve of the approaching New Year, Zhengzhou Railway Station in Henan is crowded with long queues of people waiting for the train. To Chinese people, nothing else is more important than rushing home for the reunion dinner with their families on New Year's Eve (by Yu Deshui).



On New Year's Eve these people in Shaoxing set off firecrackers in their courtyard to celebrate their family reunion. It is a very moving scene (by Chen Xiao).

On New Year's Day there is only one passenger — a photographer — on the train from Datong to Beijing. Unless for extreme professional necessity, no one would be willing to leave home and give up the opportunity of enjoying a family reunion (by Liu Guanghui).

In the days prior to New Year's Day all the shops in Hong Kong start their "New Year Sale" to get rid of all their goods in stock. This is the night fair on New Year's Eve in Victoria Park, where pedlars are engaged in a sprint to the finish (by Wong Kin Man).

At midnight on New Year's Eve the bell at the Jingci Temple in Hangzhou tolls the arrival of the new year (by Ren Jing).

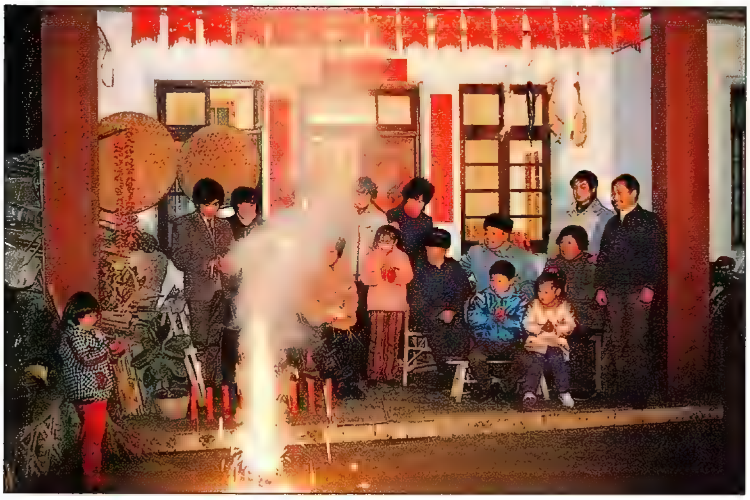
In Hong Kong, after the family reunion dinner on New Year's Eve, families love to go to the night fair in Victoria Park where they can join others in the fun and make special gift purchases for the new year (by Chan Yat Nin).

In Guilin, Guangxi, every household sets off fireworks at midnight to bid farewell to the old year and welcome in the new (by Chen Yajiang).

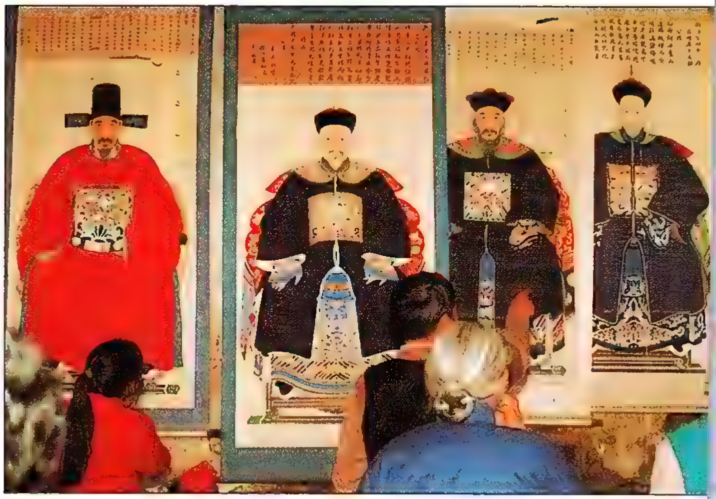
People queue up in front of the Wong Tai Sin Temple in Hong Kong on New Year's Eve waiting to burn incense to the god at midnight. The queue is about one kilometre long. It is said that the burners of incense will receive blessings from the Bodhisattva Wong Tai Sin in the coming year (by Wong Kin Man).

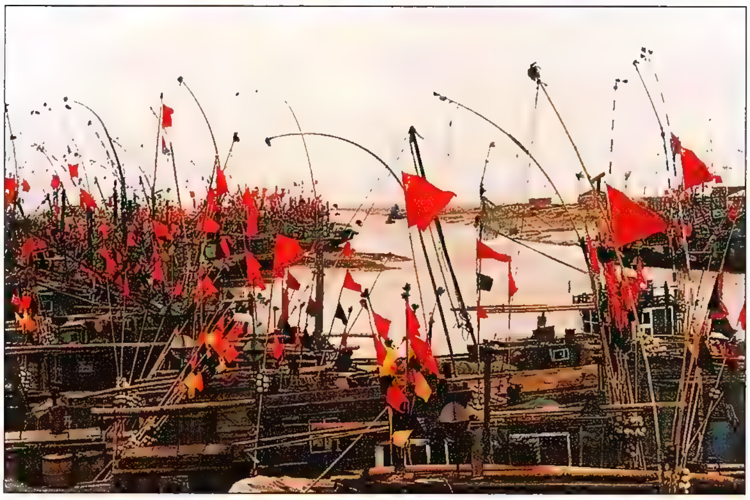
In this stretch of countryside in Northeast China, every household lights up a red lantern on New Year's Eve (by Ma Yixing).

In the countryside of the Baoshan District of Shanghai, a 105-year-old man and his family are having their New Year's Eve reunion dinner. This is an extended family of four generations living under one roof. After dinner, the adults watch the children setting off firecrackers. It is truly a picture of family bliss (by Chen Shijie).

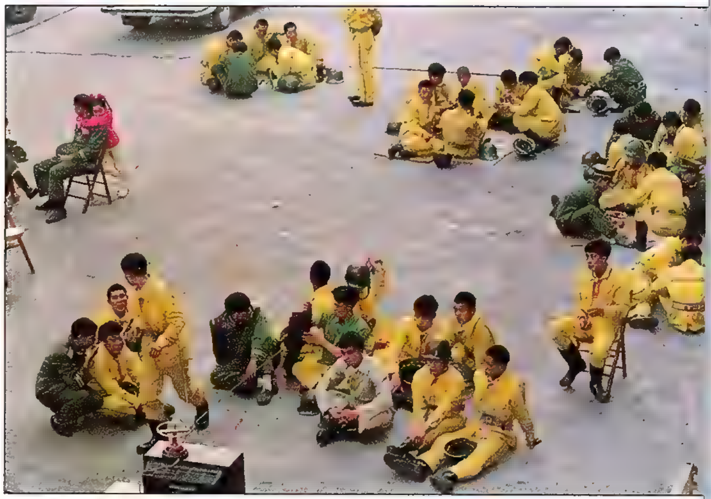


In the rural areas of Dongyang County, Zhejiang, the villagers have the custom of putting up portraits of their ancestors for the whole family to worship on New Year's Eve. The ancestors' outstanding deeds not only bring honour to the family but also serve as an inspiration and an encouragement to their descendants (by Xu Xiande).



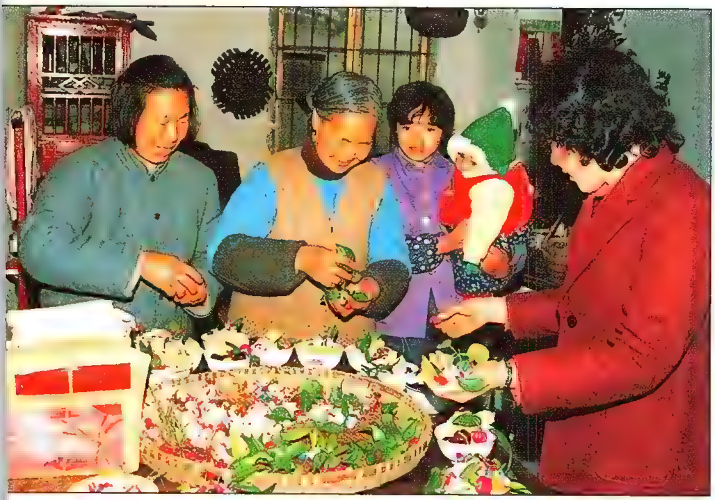


During the Spring Festival, more than 200 fishing boats anchor at the Lijiapu Dock, Huanghua City, Hebei and prepare for the commencement of the next sailing year following the Chinese New Year (by Shen Ying).

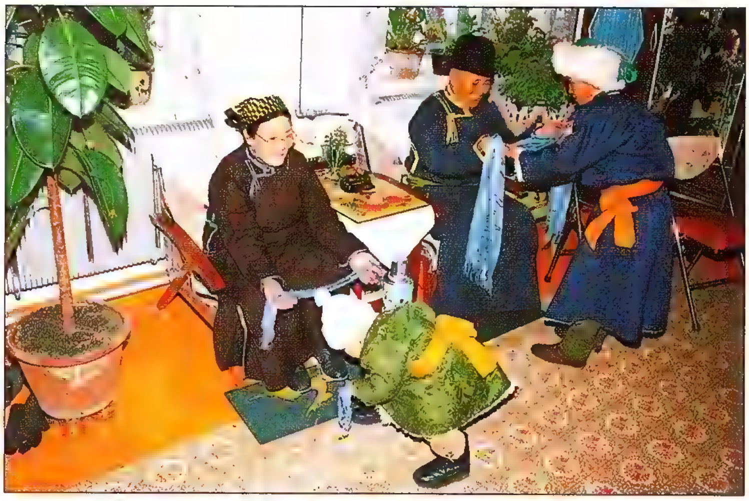


In order to ensure public safety during the New Year celebrations, members of the fire brigade in Nanning, Guangxi have to stay at their fully equipped posts. To amuse themselves they play chess and cards or watch TV (by Li Qidong).

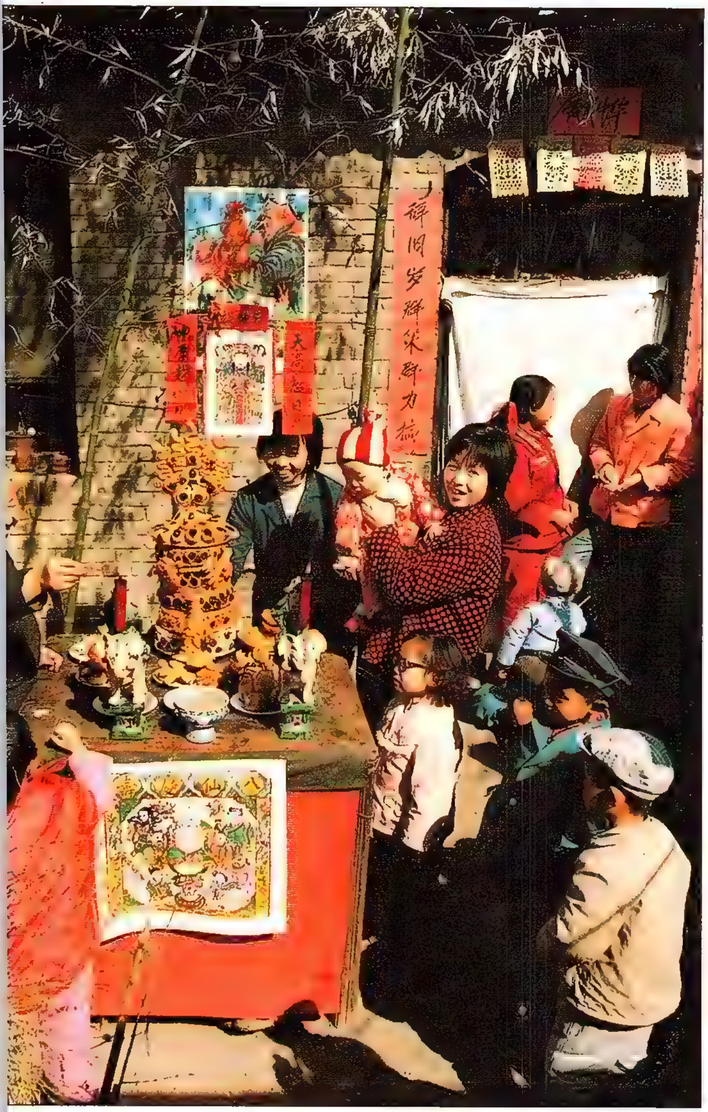
In Zhuji City in Zhejiang, when married daughters come back for the first time with their newly born babies to pay a New Year's call at their mother's home, they must prepare some presents, among which are of a kind resembling fruit made of rice syrup that look just like the real thing. The mothers then distribute these delicacies among their neighbours' children as their daughters' presents to them (by Bian Dianfu).



The nomadic Mongolian Barag tribe and his family in Hulun Buir in Inner Mongolia gather together in their holiday best on New Year's Day. The young bow and present hata *to their seniors who, after receiving the* hata, *will bestow blessings and gifts on their juniors (by Yang Yibin).*



Enjoying the Chinese traditional spectacle at the Spring Festival Dinner Party in Kangle Palace in Beijing (by Yang Kaili)



Making New Year sacrifices to heaven and earth on the New Year's Eve is a tradition of the countryside of Hongtong County, Shanxi (by Liu Anxin).

Happy Events Around New Year's Day

Chinese people love to combine many happy events with the celebration of New Year in order to make the traditional festival yet more delightful and weddings, birthday celebrations and the like are just such major happy events.

Getting married in China is an important matter for both an individual and the respective families. Chinese people are very particular about the time of wedding and always choose an auspicious day. But New Year's Eve and the several days before it are times without any taboo. It is said that the period from the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month when the Kitchen God and all other gods ascend to heaven up until New Year's Eve is a period without gods. During this period, no matter which day you choose for the wedding and whatever you do at the wedding, you cannot anger the absent gods. Weddings during this period are known as "weddings at the time of the year without the law".

No matter whether this saying is true or not, traditionally it has been practical to have weddings in this period of time. Young people, rich or poor, regard their wedding as a great event in their lives, and exert great efforts to enjoy a memorable celebration. Weddings usually cost a lot of effort and money. If a wedding takes place during a busy season or in a month when frugality is of the essence, the time and money involved are not as judiciously employed as at the end of the year when the harvest has been reaped. Moreover, if preparations for the New Year and a wedding are made simultaneously during the slack season, relatives and neighbours also have time to come over to lend a helping hand. Thus, by making use of the added resources available at New Year and by basking in the New Year's festive atmosphere, the wedding will be even more lively and successful.

In many places in China there is the custom of teasing the bride and groom in the bridal chamber. If a wedding takes place in "the time of the year without the law", normal etiquette constraints are ignored and fun runs riot.

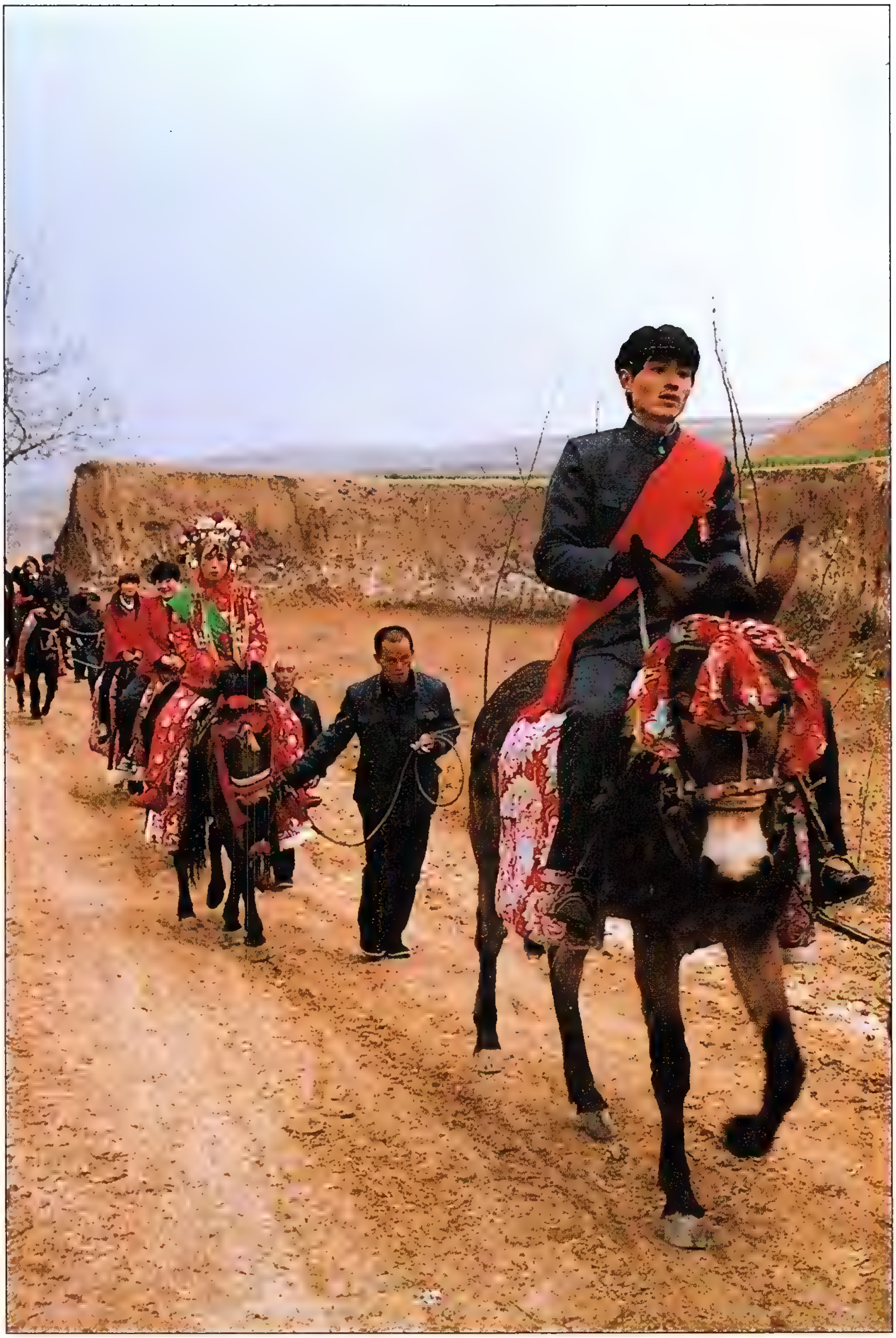
In modern times it is still a common practice to choose New Year's Eve to get married, not so much to avoid the anger of the gods but to use the New Year festivities to enhance the wedding. According to an old taboo, the bride and groom in a wedding held during the first month of the lunar year will not remain a devoted couple to the end of their lives. So the wedding must be held before the beginning of the new year. It is also said that the bridal chamber must not be left empty on New Year's Day, and that the bride must not leave her chamber and stay the night somewhere else. But nowadays people in the city no longer follow this taboo, preferring to do what pleases them best.

As in the case of weddings, people love to celebrate other happy events together with the New Year, such as an older person's birthday or a baby's completion of its first month of life. Although people cannot choose which time to be born, since the time of birth is arranged by Heaven, it is nevertheless auspicious to have a birthday around the New Year. Some people even shift their birthday celebrations to New Year's Day, several days earlier from the actual date. Those whose birthday is on New Year's Day have an added sense of self-esteem since they can see everybody around them enjoying celebrations on their birthday.

When construction of a new home has been planned, the family about to move into the new house must choose an auspicious day to set the roof beam of the house. Since ideally this building should serve as their home for a long time or the rest of their lives, ensuring that the date is a lucky one is no trivial matter. Future prosperity of the household as well as abundant harvests are considered to rest on choosing the right time to set the beam of the new house.

Since all the days around the New Year are considered auspicious and virtually everyone has an abundance of leisure time, quite often would-be home dwellers select one of these days for this ceremony. With everybody in an holiday mood and sufficient free time to prepare food and beverages for the occasion, roof beam setting around the New Year is bound to be a memorable event for all.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

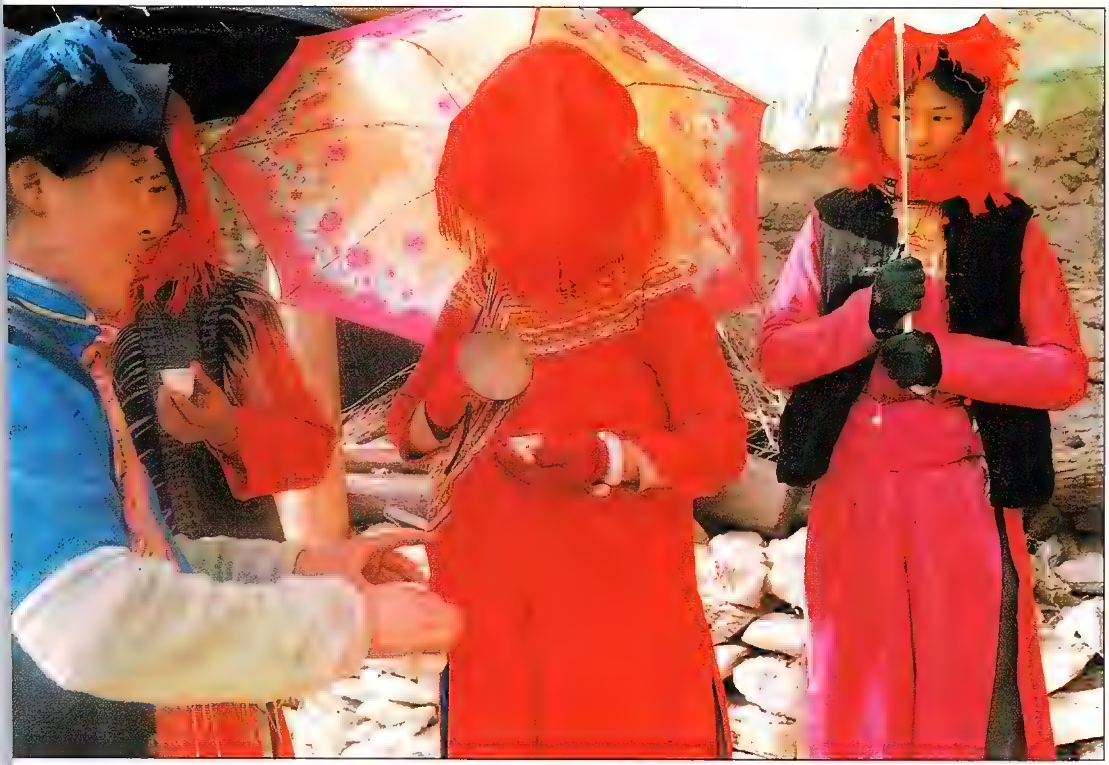


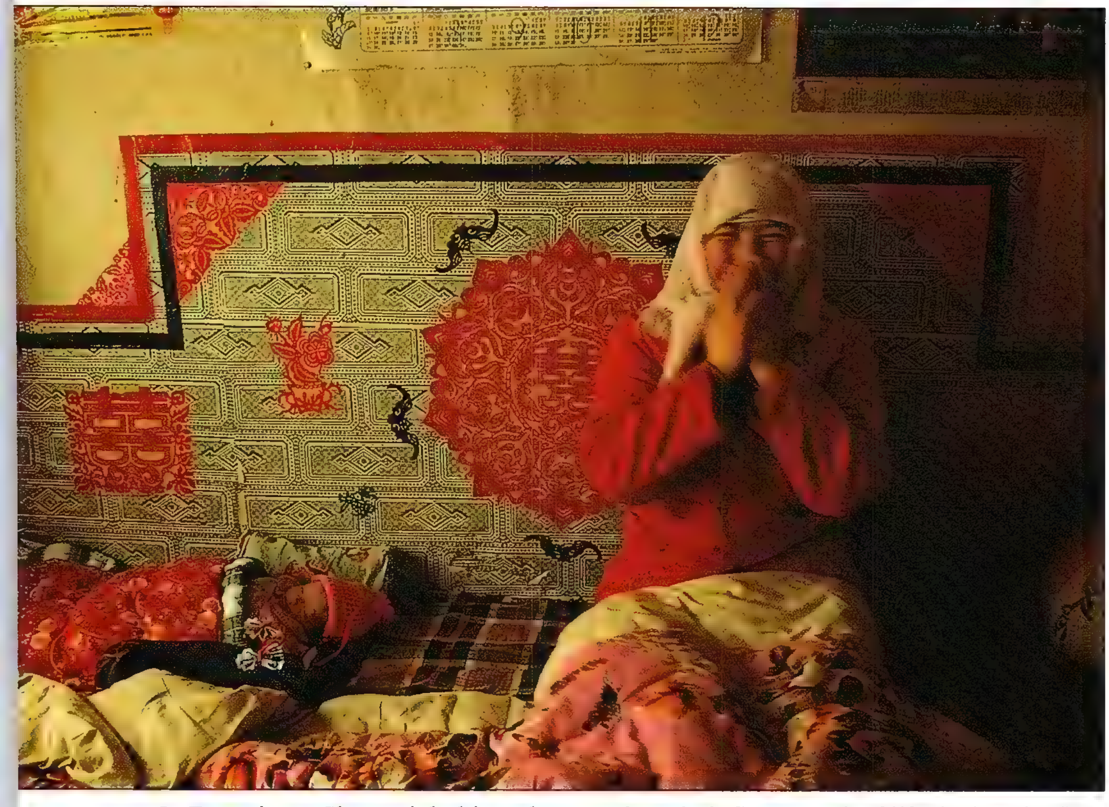
The grooms in Manliuhe Township, Lucheng County, Shanxi still follow the traditional customs of marriage — riding on a mule for the house of the groom's family after receiving the bride (by Wang Yunliang).

A wedding is held in the countryside of Chuansha County in Shanghai. It is as decorous an occasion as any wedding in the big city (by Wang Hechun).

In Tieling City, Liaoning, a Korean family is holding a birthday party for a sixty-year-old elder (by Wang Jiku).

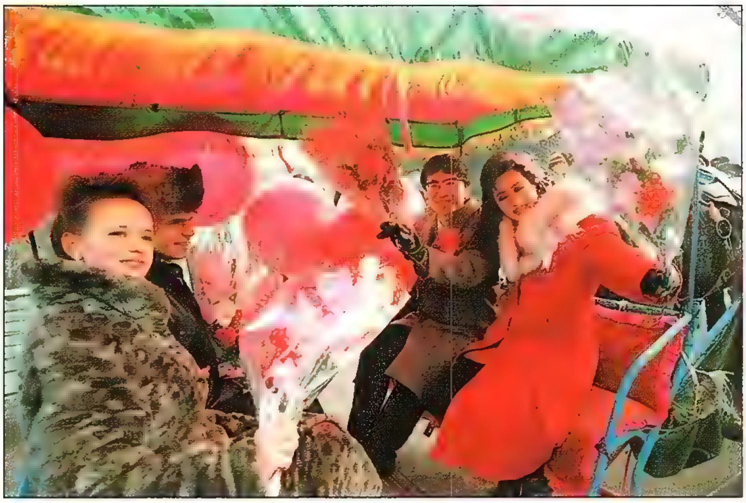
In Maoxian County, Sichuan, Qiang nationality girls must drink "departure wine" when they are married (by Li Bing).



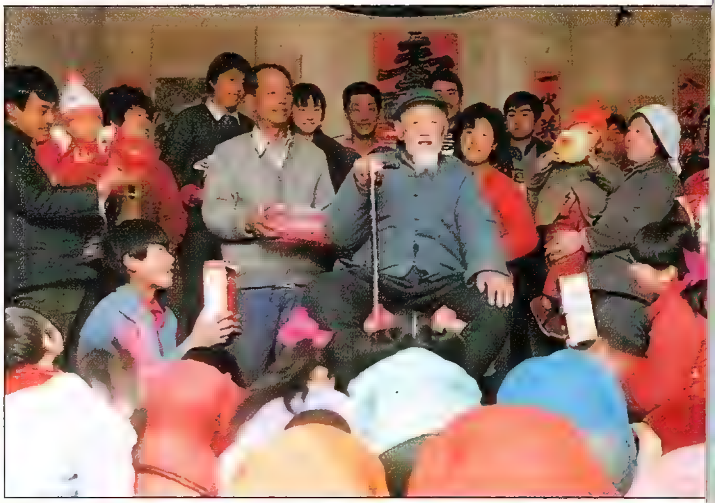


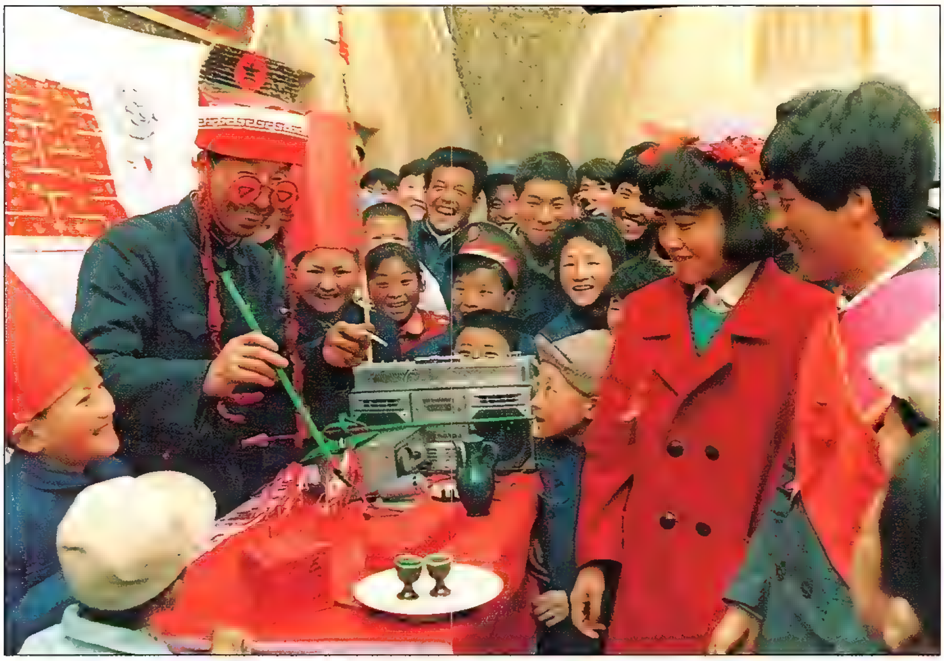
In Fengxiang, Shaanxi, babies who complete their first month of life during the first lunar month are considered the most fortunate. The ceremony at the end of the month is very grand and the gifts are numerous. This mother and her baby son are greeted by relatives and friends (by Shi Baoxiu).

A Russian couple at a collective wedding ceremony in Harbin in Heilongjiang(by Ma Yixing)

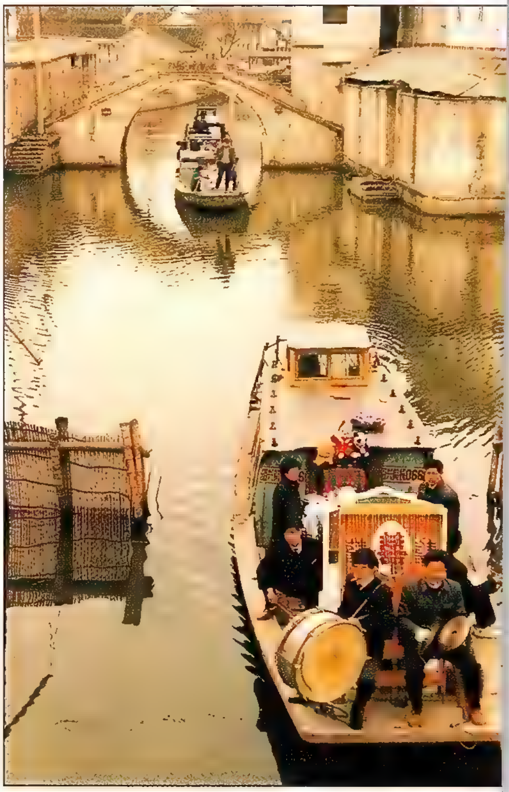


The fourth day of the first lunar month marks this old man's 94th birthday. His children and grandchildren gather together to wish him a Happy New Year and a happy birthday (by Shen Ying).





In the vicinity of Qingyang, Gansu, there is still the custom known as "Teasing by the Matchmaker". The matchmaker, wearing spectacles, with a pipe in his right hand and a hat made of sorghum stalks and earrings of red peppers, amuses people with his performances as he waits for the bride and groom to offer him wine (by Wei Fengzheng).



In the outskirts of Shaoxing, weddings in the first lunar month are very popular because firstly, weddings at this time can enhance the festivities of the New Year, and secondly, relatives and friends usually stay at home for holidays during this period and have time to come over to express their greetings. On the sixth day of the first lunar month these two boats laden with the bride's dowry are headed for the groom's home (by Chen Xiao).

The rural people in Wuxian County in Suzhou are particular about preparing the bedding before a wedding. The pair of red candles on the bed in the bridal chamber symbolizes good health and long life for the bride and groom (by Zhou Xiande).

This couple in Fengxiang in Shaanxi celebrates their wedding in the traditional style on the fourth day of the first lunar month (by Sun Jianzhong).

At Liujiata Village in Linxian County, Shanxi, the groom is married into the bride's family (by Shan Xiaogang).

红梅並蒂相映美
嬌燕雙飛試比高

The even-numbered days of the lunar months around the Spring Festival are regarded by the natives as the most auspicious days for festivities in the mountainous areas in southern Anhui. This is the eighth day of the first lunar month and the entrance hall is piled with presents from relatives and friends (by Kang Shiwei).

Festival from the First to the Fifteenth Day of the First Lunar Month

As soon as the New Year's Day has passed, from the second day of the first month, but most notably from the fifth day, people begin their Spring Festival with lots of social activities, which marks the end of events hitherto confined to the home or family. The period from the second to the fifteenth or sixteenth day and beyond marks the most exciting and spectacular of events at any time of the year — a Chinese style carnival. The Chinese go out of their homes and visit relatives and friends, hold gatherings of one sort or another, parade in the street, hold feasts and enjoy theatrical performances. They make merry to their heart's content, giving vent to emotions accumulated over one year of hard work and constraints imposed by the discipline of customs and traditions. This series of popular folk activities marking the arrival of spring are collectively referred to as the ceremony of journeying to the spring. The ceremony has a fixed time schedule. From the first day to the fifteenth day, practically every day is a specific festive occasion. Though customs may differ from locality to locality — from south to north, we can find something common to all of these activities.

We might as well begin with New Year's Day, on which members of the same family greet each other and have fun together. This is an auspicious day. Demons and ghosts are left out of the picture. There are no sacrifices made to the gods on this day. There are exceptions to this rule however, as sacrifices are made in some localities in China even on this day.

The first day of the first month in the lunar calendar is referred to as chicken's day. The character for chicken in Chinese is pronounced *ji,* which is homonymous with another character meaning luck. On this account we find drawings, pictures or paintings of chickens being displayed in Chinese homes to drive away evil spirits and to pursue good luck or fortune.

The second day is known as dog's day, on which the Chinese call on other people to wish them a happy new year or to worship their ancestors.

The third day is generally called sheep's day, but in certain parts of China the day is described as "red mouth" day, because on this day people are likely to pick up a quarrel or bicker with other people. The day is therefore deemed unfit for visiting friends or relatives. It is usually the occasion to worship ancestors or gods. In some parts of China, however, custom prescribes it as a day for a son-in-law returning home to wish a happy New Year to his father-in-law. It is also a day for the mother-in-law to invite their married daughters and sons-in-law to their homes for a reunion. Elsewhere in China, however, the third day is described as the birthday of farmland or the birthday of rice or wheat or another crop and is an occasion to offer sacrifices to the farmland itself.

The fourth day on which the God of Wealth is worshipped in parts of the country is known as pig's day. Preparations are in process for opening business the following day. In case the boss of a company wants to fire someone that someone is not invited to the ceremony of worship on this day — an indication that he would have to look for another job.

The fifth day is ox's day, an important occasion. This is the day on which all taboos previously practised during the New Year Festival come to an end. This is an occasion to send away all the rubbish accumulated during the past several days, when it was taboo to send them to the dustbin or down the chute for fear that good fortune might also be sent away along with the rubbish. Now, throwing out the rubbish described as "poor soil or earth" in Chinese is tantamount to throwing away poverty. According to another account, the fifth day is the birthday of the God of Wealth , a day set for the welcoming of that god.

The sixth day is known as horse's day — the day to send off the God of Wealth by burning his pictures. This is the occasion marking the reopening of business, when all shops and stores commence operations.

The seventh day is considered man's day, or the birthday of human-kind. According to the Taoists, the chicken was the first creature created in the world followed by the dog, pig, sheep, ox, horse, and then man. Man is the most respected of beings. In him is embodied the spirit of all living things. Tinfoil in the form of a man or a woman and flower cuts decorate the hair of women or are sent as gifts to relatives and friends. Since it is a universal birthday of all human beings it is immensely jubilant, and firecrackers are set off, and dinners are held. It is also customary to have a firework display at night for it is also the birthday of the God of Fire!

The eighth day is grain day. Since all stars are supposed to come down to earth on this day, it is set aside for welcoming these stars. Altars are set up in temples, which accept donations or offerings from believers.

Animals, men and grain serving as symbols for the first to eighth day probably indicate the Chinese forebears' imperfect understanding of the relation between natural objects and the climate. But these relationships have lost any functional value in the customs of Spring Festival as activities are only held on chicken's day, man's day and farmland day.

The ninth day is commonly called the birthday of the Emperor of Heaven (Jade Emperor), the supreme ruler of the deities, on which day a big celebration is held to offer sacrifices to Heaven.

The tenth day commemorates the birthday of stone. Implements made of stone, such as rollers, grinders or rice hulling hammers, etc., are left alone. Joss-sticks are burnt in front of the stone implements. In the Central Plains cakes baked on heated stones are eaten. It is also considered the wedding day of rats. Lamps are kept burning all night and prayers offered while incense is burnt to avoid plague by rats. Food is also prepared on this day to enable rats to celebrate the wedding ceremony. The rat's wedding falls on different dates in different places, — usually on the twelfth, seventeenth or twenty-fourth day. Theatrical performances are also held to mark the occasion, when actors and actresses play the part of a rat bridegroom and bride.

Following the tenth day the country enters into a period of preparation for the coming Lantern Festival. Nothing special takes place during this period, in which people busily decorate their homes with lanterns and coloured ribbons. Lanterns are hung up in their places on the thirteenth day but they may be displayed as early as on the tenth day. The fourteenth is the lantern-testing day and one finds all places already bustling with noise and excitement, in anticipation of the big day. The actual Lantern Festival falls on the fifteenth day, when the night is lit as bright as day with lanterns. The festival lasts well into the following day.

This chronology of festivities, still observed in many rural communities in China, is no longer observed with any precision in big cities. The custom of holding celebrations on Lantern Festival yet remains popular throughout the country.

This festival, with activities around the fifteenth, brings the New Year celebration to a climax. There is a long list of carnival activities as people perform the dragon dance, lion dance, dressing parade, acrobatics, operas, *yangko,* stilts performances and the waist drum dance. At night people watch lantern displays, visit parks, enjoy fireworks, etc. as great fanfare marks the end of one and a half months of New Year celebrations. It is like the last string of firecrackers being popped. The deafening noise suddenly comes to an abrupt end.

Translated by He Fei

Thousands of Families Gather to See the Theatre in its Varied Forms

The more important New Year celebration activities receive particular attention in rural China. Different gods are worshipped on the occasion as prayers are also offered. Many people also go on pilgrimages at this time. On certain days according to schedule they visit Buddhist and Taoist temples. When so many people gather together, it becomes like a fair. The worshippers naturally want to buy things, such as food, toys, incense and joss-sticks. The businessmen and folk artists come to offer their wares and services. The temple becomes a big market-place for the exchange of goods and for the enjoyment of theatrical performances. It offers the most entertaining diversion to the people of rural China who otherwise have hardly any other social activities. Whether one intends to worship gods or not, he will go out to the temple to visit friends or see his loved ones. He will buy or sell; he will see many new things as well as enjoy himself — this being the main function of the big and small temple fairs.

In observing the New Year, in particular, the period from the second to the fifteenth days of the first lunar month, gatherings of people are seen on the larger scale more frequently than at any other time. Many fairs are held on the premises of temples. They are more often than not for spring outings, and are not particularly related to any religious worship. A sea of people is seen in the temple fair, where acrobatic and theatrical troupes of various sorts congregate, too. There are lots of specialized New Year commodities, delicious delicacies, toys that greet the eyes and aromas that greet the nostrils. Everyone, young and old, will get what he or she wants. It is a genuine occasion of joy for everyone who attends the fair.

Even in cities, temple fairs still have an enduring appeal. The temple fairs held in Ditan (Temple of Earth) and Xiannongtan (Altar to the God of Agriculture) in Beijing regularly each year last many days, and are attended by city and rural people alike. The occasion is indeed a busy one.

The Long History of Temple Fairs

The Chinese term for "temple fair" can be translated as "temple market", "annual market", or "the fair where all the local people gather and celebrate the coming New Year". Temple fairs probably date back to the times when temples were first constructed. According to legend, the idea of a market was first attributed to Shennong, the Divine Farmer, while the temple fair was inspired by the idea of people congregating to offer sacrifices to their ancestors and gods. As the economies and societies in different areas take different paths of development, so the temple fairs in various villages, while sharing common features, have their own individual character.

In rural communities of China, among all performances held at this time, Spring Fairs offer many attractions. Temporary stages are erected to play operas. In ordinary times it is not easy for the rural population to see an opera performed in their locality. Even if they do have an opera it is usually performed by local amateur artists. It is only in the New Year season that operas are performed from morning till night. On one stage there is acrobatic fighting, patronized by younger lovers of the art while close by on another stage, a drama of gifted scholars and beautiful ladies is performed, attracting the attention of lovers of aria or opera score. When the opera is performed by a big troupe from the city, it is greeted with warm applause as a matter of course. But operas performed by local troupes may be more meaningful as they contain local flavour. They are enacted with greater exaggeration of movement. The actors and actresses are used to playing parts in dimly lit stages. The theatre is now in the open air. The players sing on the stage while the audience talks about the opera down below. The scene is therefore a noisy one. To adapt themselves to this kind of surroundings, the actors and actresses are called upon to play their parts by over-emphasized means — dramatized facial features thanks to make-up, and vigorous movements and gestures, with very loud drums and gongs thrown in.

Apart from big operas there are monkey shows, story-telling, acrobatics, magic show, martial arts, *qigong* demonstrations, puppet shows and shadow plays. Every opera has its own audience and every show addresses a certain yearning, with a particular form of artistic expression that suits the subject matter. Likewise, the fair provides satisfaction to everyone!

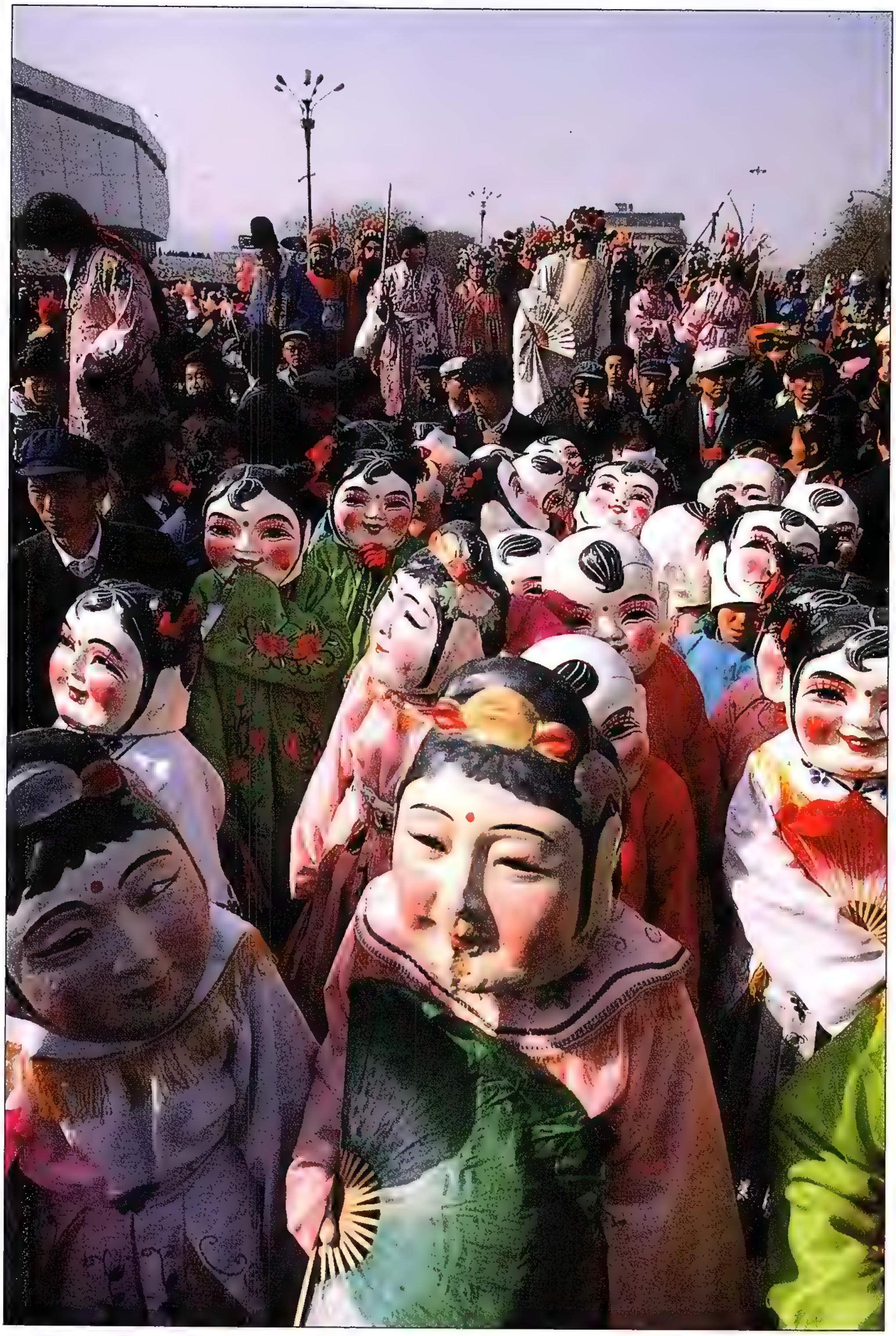
Theatrical Performances in Shaoxing

During the Spring Festival in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, people in villages will organize some village theatrical performances as part of the activities honouring the local village deity. This is a custom of long standing which may have reached a fervent climax during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Presently these dramatic presentations are a grand recreational activity to be held during the New Year.

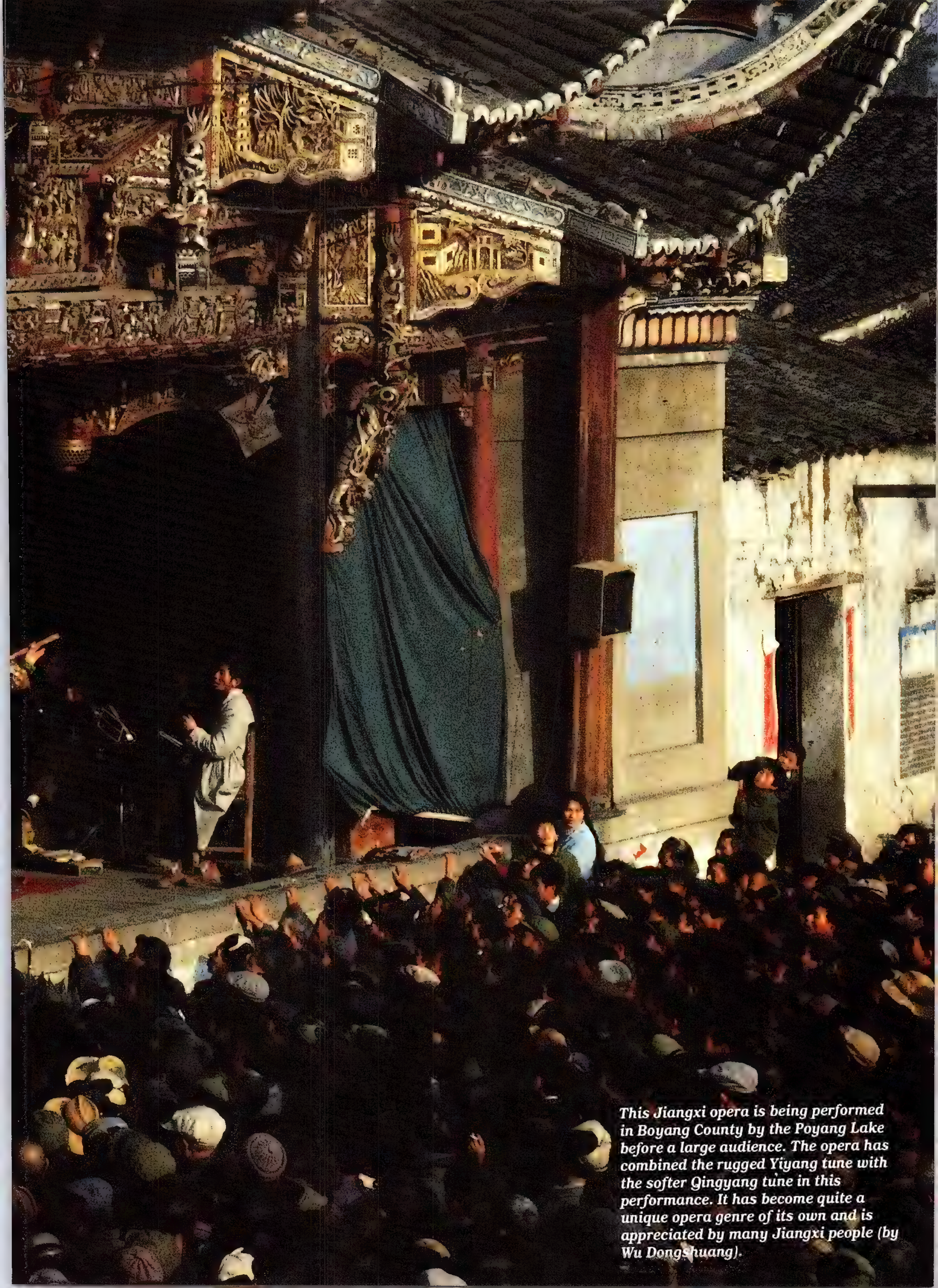
These local theatrical performances, known as *shexi*, or Peace opera, can run anywhere from three to a dozen days. In Shaoxing, characterized by its numerous waterways, sometimes hundreds of fishing boats converge surrounding the open air theatre on three sides. Fishermen enjoy the opera from the privacy of their own boats or disembarking to get a closer look.

These performances are generally classified into three categories The first is a choreography with the theme of hope and good fortune to all, while the second will have an exciting and complicated plot and involve a high degree of acrobatic skills from the performers. The most popular of all is the third type which depicts scenes from family life.

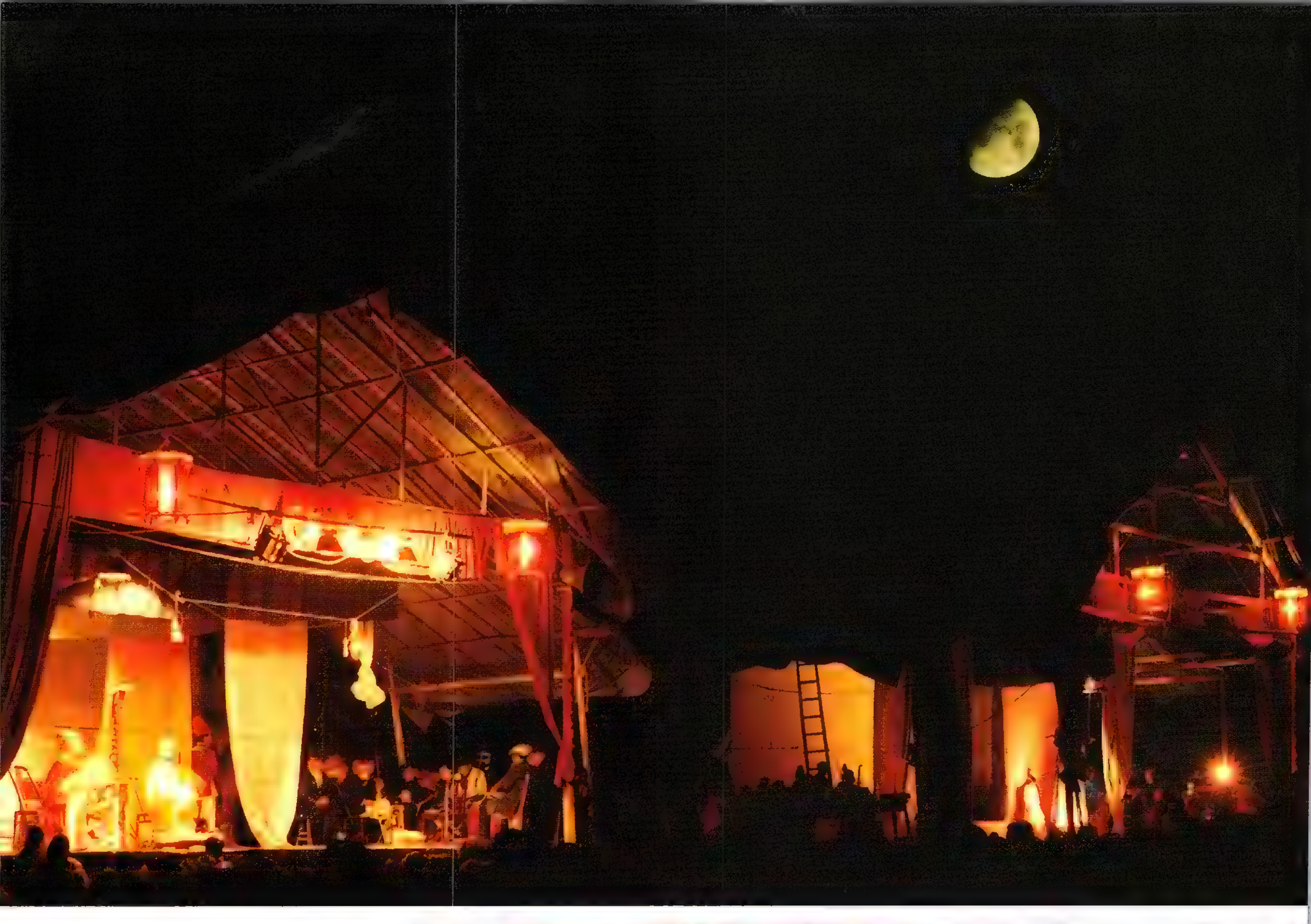
Translated by He Fei



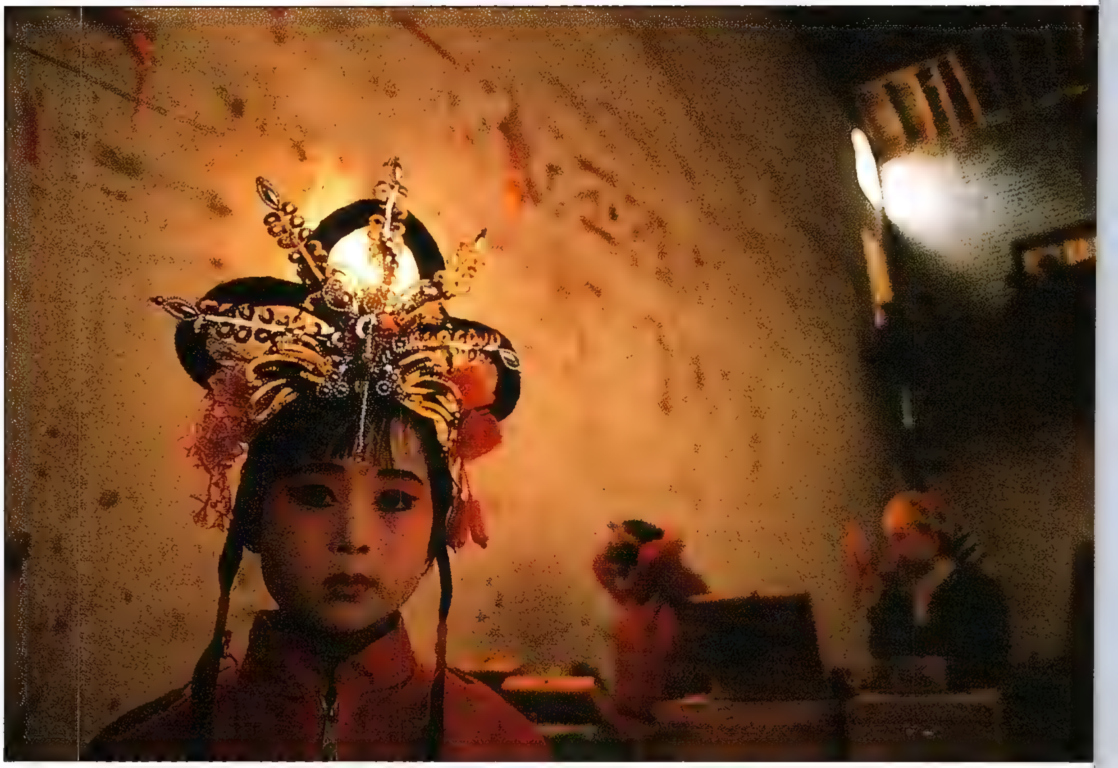
In the suburbs of Lanzhou, Gansu, on the tenth day of the Chinese New Year, the farmers are entering the city in order to perform the shehuo *performances (by Zhang Runxiu).*



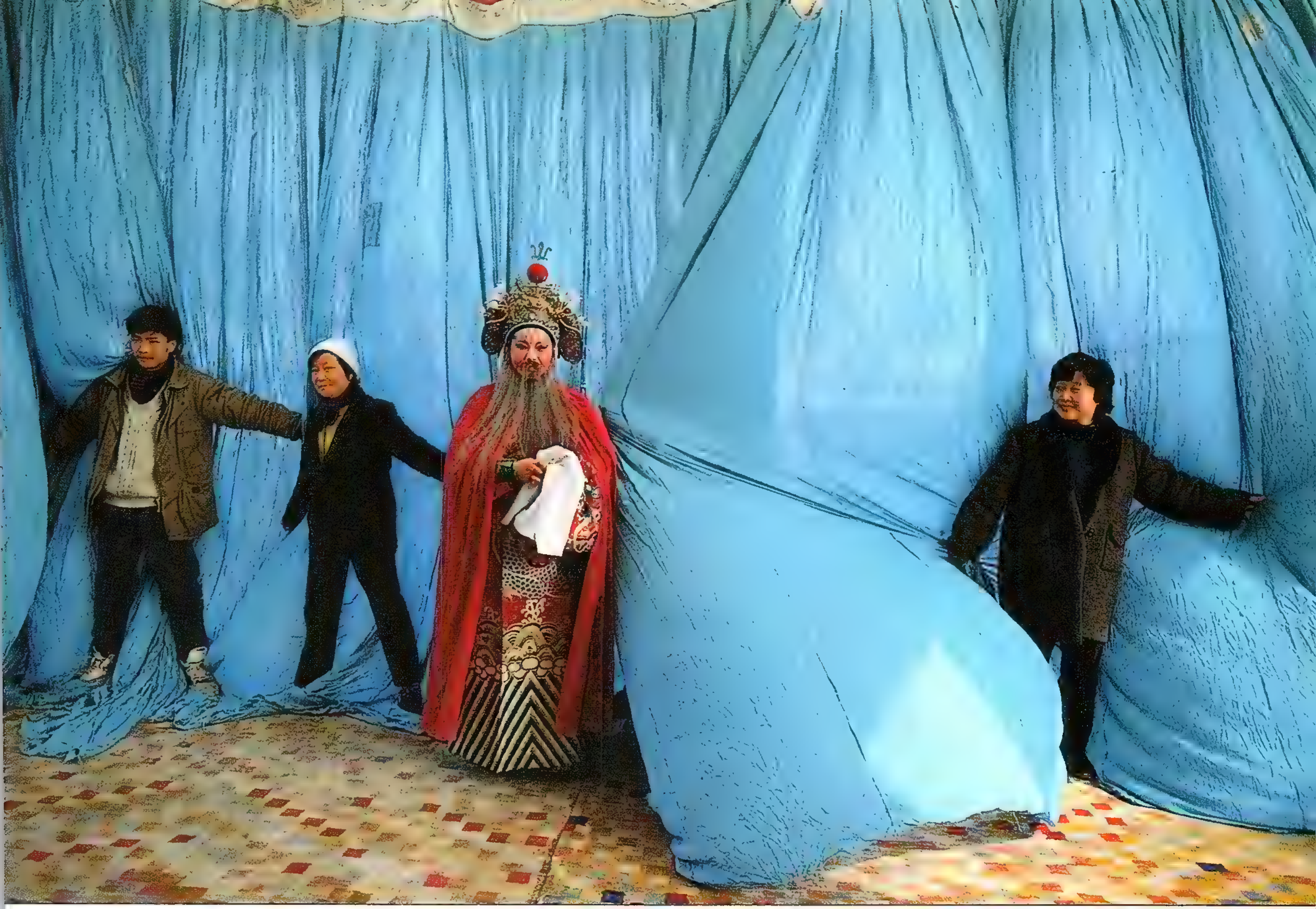
This Jiangxi opera is being performed in Boyang County by the Poyang Lake before a large audience. The opera has combined the rugged Yiyang tune with the softer Qingyang tune in this performance. It has become quite a unique opera genre of its own and is appreciated by many Jiangxi people (by Wu Dongshuang).

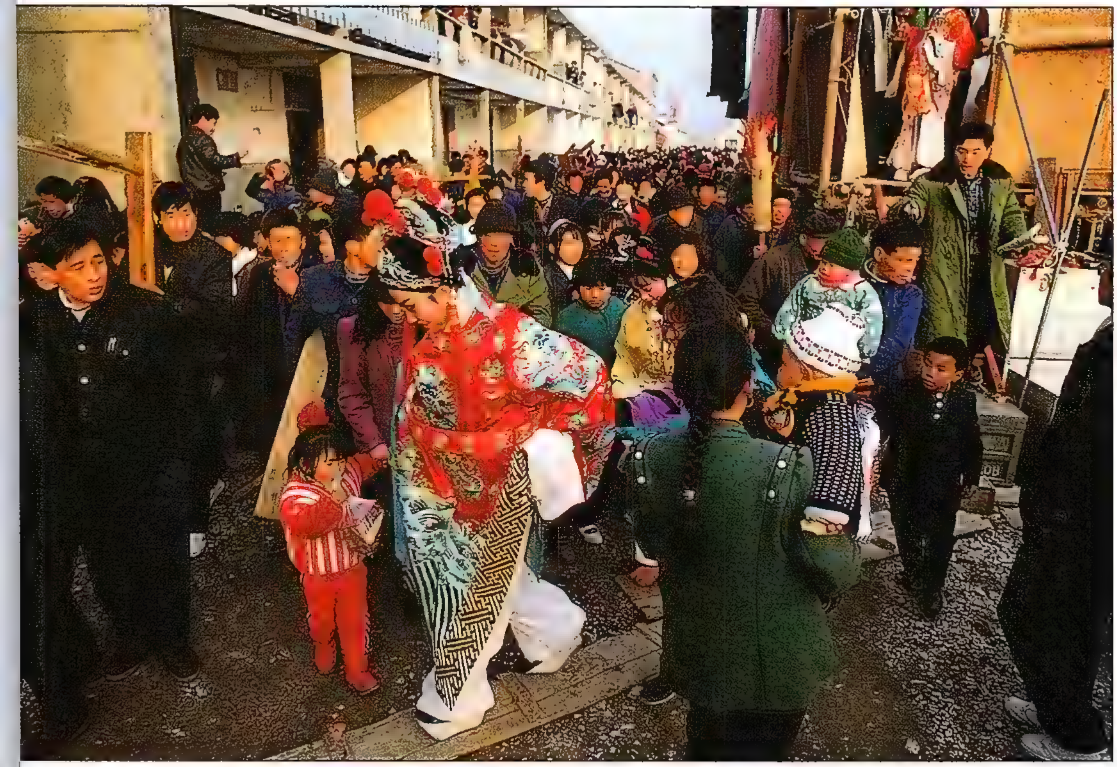


Operas performed on stages that stand facing each other are held in Pujiang County, Zhejiang Province on the tenth day of the first lunar month. An open ground is used here to enable four stages to be erected at the corners. Two stages can be seen respectively in the south and north of this compound. They provide a busy scene. The "opposite stage theatre", as it is translated from the Chinese, originated in the rural districts of Pujiang County. The performance is a ceremony held to celebrate a rich harvest of the past year as well as to hope for another one in the coming year (by Song Mingliang).



Operas are being performed for three consecutive days during the Lantern Festival in Chaoyu, Baoji, Shaanxi Province. Actors and actresses are quite busy and get tired as they have morning and afternoon matinées as well as evening performances on this occasion. Despite fatigue they take great care in their make-up (by Wang Wenlan).





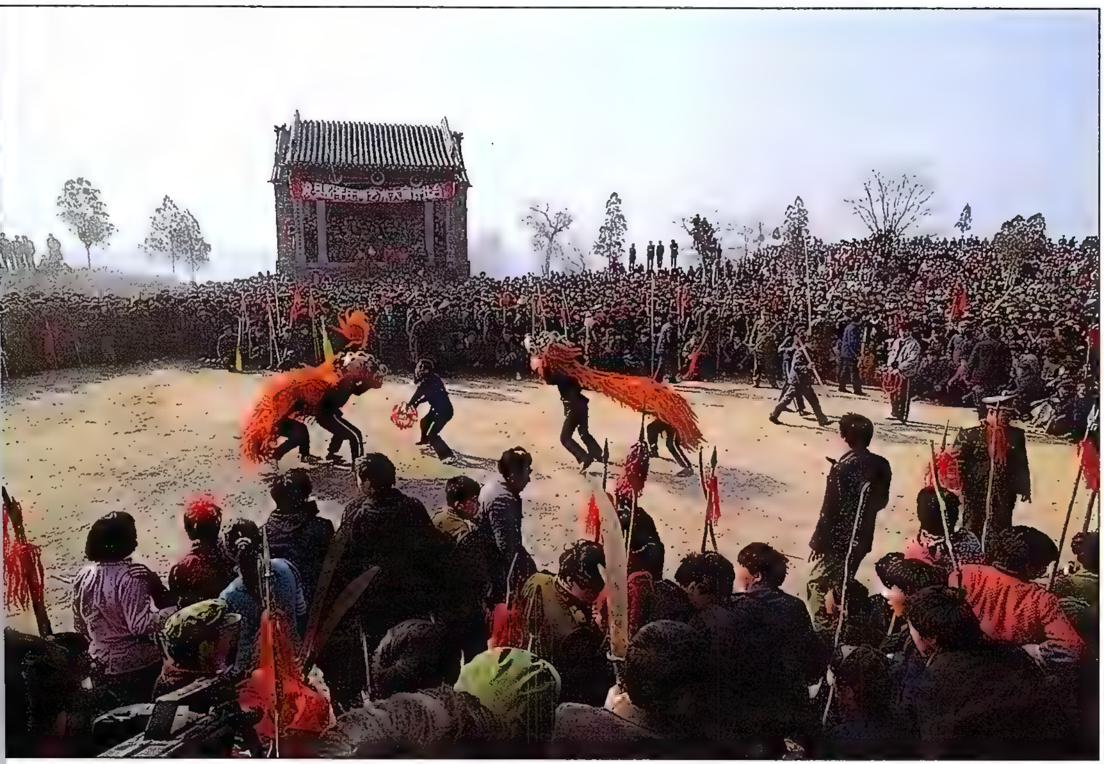
The opera performed as a sort of ritual of spring is going to start soon on the second day of the first month in Shaoxing, Zhejiang. This is a tense moment of anticipation as actresses and actors wait for the curtain to rise, having just finished applying their make-up (by Xie Guanghui).

On the third day of the Lunar New Year, tens of thousands of villagers from the countryside around Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province gather here to watch Shaoxing opera being performed on the stage. The opera has a tradition dating back some two hundred years, being a major genre among local operas throughout the province (by Xie Guanghui).

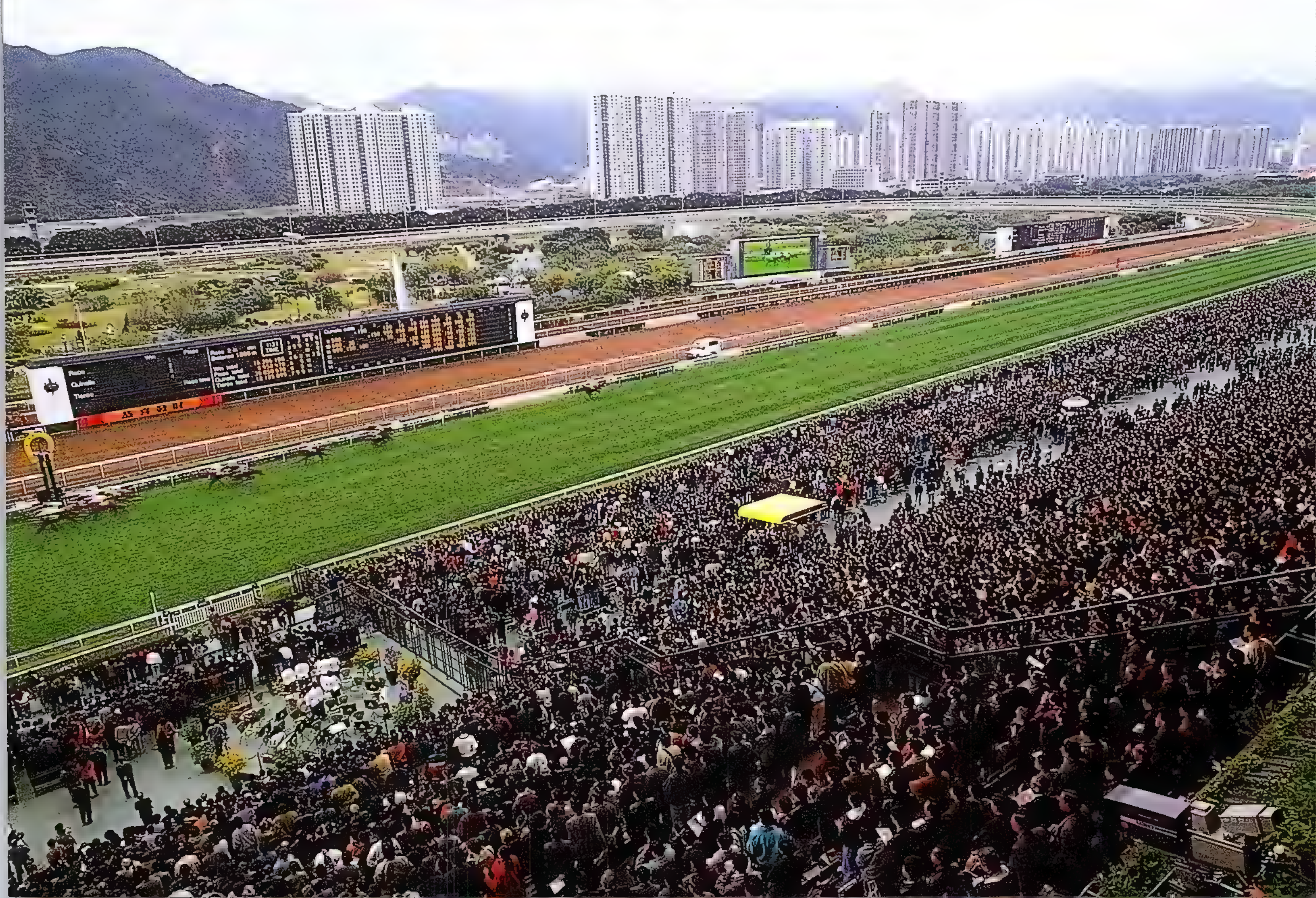
In the temple fair at Tianhou Temple, Quanzhou in Fujian Province on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, a group of vigorous young farmers are performing a dance known as patting the chest (by Shangguan Zhonghua).

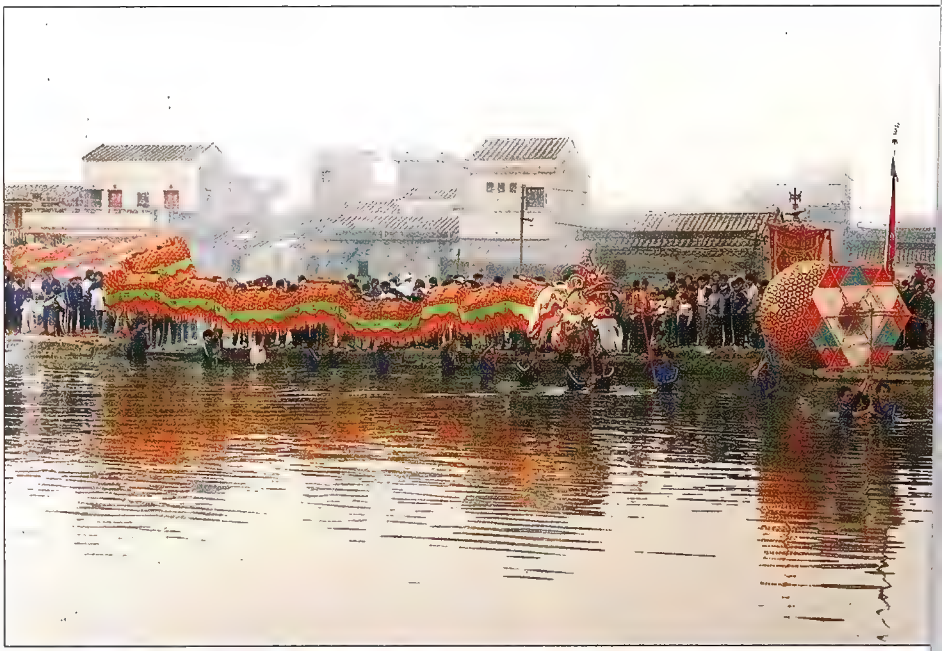
The first market fair is held in Fengcheng, Jiangxi Province on the third day of the first lunar month. As the Long Dragon Dance is being performed at every corner, the dancers are greeted by firecrackers from every household (by Li Qing).

This temple fair on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in Xunxian, Henan Province is very busy, attended by 200,000 people. As the procession of shehuo *teams pass the temple, the performers render their best performances on the occasion (by Yu Deshui).*

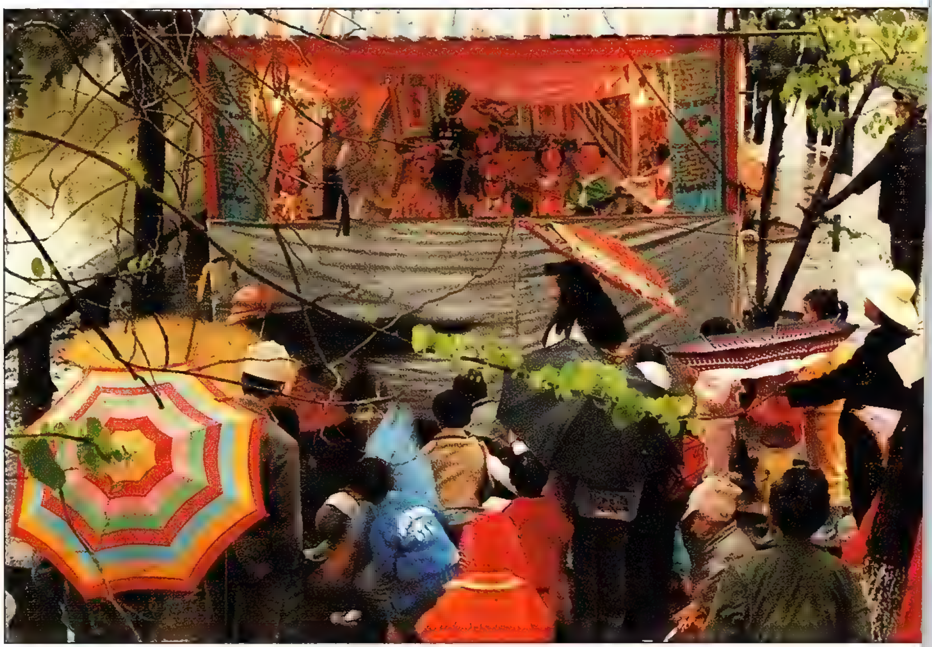


On the third day of the first month, many Hong Kong people gather at the race-course in Shatin. Besides hoping to win some lucky money from the Jockey Club, Hong Kong people would also like to be the beneficiary of an auspicious event to appropriately launch the new year (by Wong Kin Man).

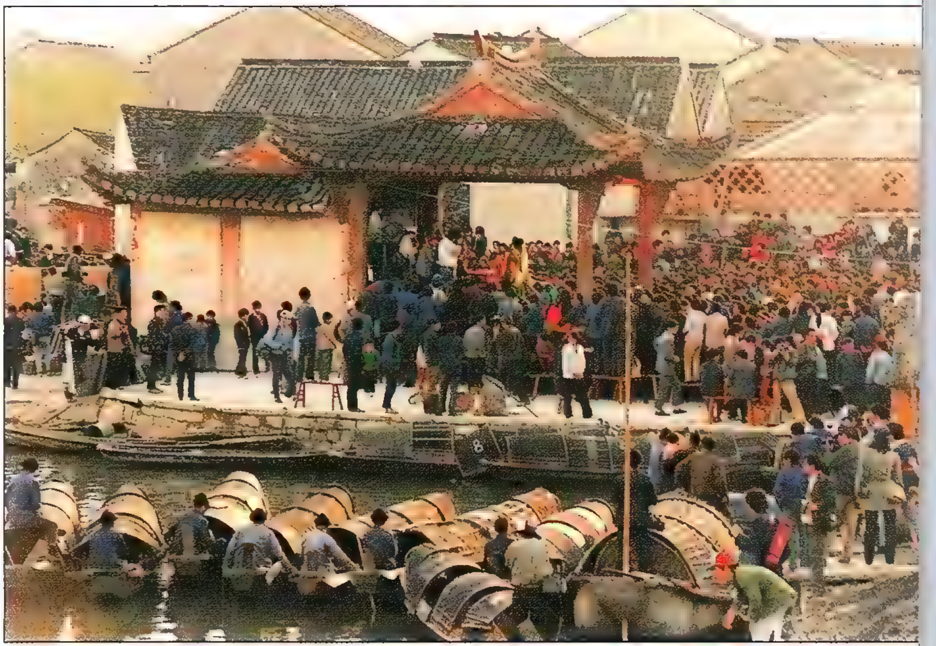




Dancers have to make their way into and out of Jinlong Village by wading across a pond on the thirteenth day of the first lunar month when they perform the Dragon Dance in Kaiping, Guangdong Province (by Li Jinchang).



Beginning from the second day of the first lunar month, puppet shows are performed by folk artists from villages and towns in Wenchang County on the island of Hainan. Selections from operas are performed during the day and whole operas in the evening. The enthusiasm of the audience is in no way dampened by the drizzle. With umbrellas held upside down some people are hoping to catch token money being tossed by the rich man on the stage. Anyone who can catch the money is believed to stand a good chance of becoming rich (by Lin Hongping).



Watching local opera during Spring Festival is a tradition observed by farmers in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. Because it abounds in rivers and creeks, the county had earned the name "waterside country". Many people come to see the performance in boats on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. They watch the performance comfortably from their boats when the river banks are overcrowded with people, certainly a unique crowd of theatre goers (by Chen Xiao).

Cockfighting is held on New Year's Day in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province (by Yu Huitong).

On the second day of the first lunar month, a traditional performance is being held in the fair in Ruicheng County, Shanxi Province. Scantily clad young people hold a contest in lifting up a stone grinder and stone lock (by Chen Jiufeng).

Danxian County in Hainan Province has a reputation of long standing of being the Sea of Songs. During festive occasions including the Spring Festival, singing activities are held. On the sixteenth day of the first lunar month, young men and girls gather together for a singing contest (by Wu Wensheng).

Shehuo Performances

Of all the activities involved in celebrating the Spring Festival, the largest in scale, and the most magnificent and influential are the *shehuo* performances. Held as part of the Lantern Festival, the *shehuo* performances are the grandest event and arouse keen excitement throughout the country.

Generally speaking, *shehuo* performances include a number of pageant plays and dances such as the *yangko* dance, stilt-walking, the land boat dance, the lion dance, the dragon dance and the waist-drum dance. But the term mainly refers to a unique presentation which incorporates the arts of drama, song and dance and acrobatics as well as the crafts of plaiting and installation. The latter kind of *shehuo* performances is popular mainly in Shaanxi, Shanxi, Gansu, Yunnan and southern China, as well as within some regions in East China. The shows vary from region to region, but for the most part, the presenters enact their roles in a highly elevated position which enhances their dramatis personae with a sense of danger and has a strong impact on spectators.

Immortals Descending in *Shehuo* and *Piaose*

During the Spring Festival and Lantern Festival celebrations, *shehuo* performances are no doubt a great draw to men and women, old and young. Dressing up as immortals, theatrical heroes, gifted scholars and pretty ladies, and standing high above thousands of spectators, the performers seem to be floating in the air. It is incredible that some of the performers stand in three tiers with the one on the upper tier seemingly supported only by a thin weapon or a fan!

Shehuo performances differ from region to region in form as well as name. In the north they are categorized as certain *shehuo*, *taige* (pavilion carrying), *gaotai* (high platform) or *xinzi* (wick). In Guangdong they are called *piaose* (floating beauty). Cantonese call beautiful dresses or decorated objects *se*. The performers appear to be floating (*piao* in Cantonese), thus they are called *piaose*.

The simplest *shehuo* performance is the ground *shehuo*. It is a pageant performed by dozens of able-bodied men and women from the village, who dress up as theatrical figures and wear masks. A more complicated form of *shehuo* is called *bei shehuo (shehuo* carried on the back), which is performed by an adult carrying one to three children on his back. The adult has to sway when advancing to enable the small performers on his back to appear to be suspended in mid-air. Mountain *shehuo* takes a multi-tiered mountain-like frame constructed of rafters as its stage. The frame is carried forward by people while the performers execute on each tier of the frame. *Beigan* (pole carried on the back) in Heyang, Shaanxi Province, uses poles as props. The base of the pole is tied to the shoulder of a strong carrier. The middle section of the pole is decorated with colourful paper birds, beasts and flowers. A child performs on the upper part, which is made of iron looking like a wick. The higher the child is placed, the more intriguing the performance is. This kind of performance usually consists of a colourful formation of dozens of poles. The performers of *xinzi shehuo* are mostly children, who are secured in elaborate frames made of steel rods, which are concealed from view. The young performers look like they are standing in the air and create a mysterious aura.

The ways of frame-building and the performance of Guangdong's *piaose* are similar to those of *xinzi shehuo*. Its ingeniousness exists in the delicate connection between the *piao* performer who is usually two or three years old and is fixed on the upper tier, and the *ping* (screen) performer who is usually five or six years old standing on the lower tier. The connection is in fact a thin steel rod delicately concealed in the costumes of the performers. There is no sign of support for the child on the upper tier, so that he seems to drift in the air. A set of *piaose* is called one *tai* (platform). This means the characters of a theatrical story are arranged on a specially made platform. The pageant of *piaose* is called *chuse* (radiating beauty). Before the time for *chuse*, people in every village beat their brains to design novel forms of *piaose*, thus enabling spectators to have the opportunity to feast their eyes.

The present-day *shehuo* pageants move forward mostly by modern means of transport and are thus called *che shehuo (shehuo* on cars). In underdeveloped regions, the performances are on horse or ox-carts, while in developed regions, on tractors or trucks.

Shehuo performances are silent shows. Consequently they employ facial make-up with striking colours, which exaggerates expressive features. The facial make-up looks bold, unrestrained and mysterious.

Shehuo performances have their origin in ancient rites held by the imperial court on the 24th of the twelfth lunar month or New Year's Eve to banish evil spirits. During the course of time, *shehuo* performances developed from these rites. Today, the performances are designed with popular entertainment in mind rather than with driving away evil spirits, and have succeeded in becoming the most fascinating forms of entertainment during the New Year celebrations.

Joyful *Yangko* Dance and Stilt-Walking

In northern China, the *yangko* dance, stilt-walking and waist-drum dance are a sine que non in pageants and troupes paying New Year's calls on other villages during the Spring Festival. The *yangko* dance in particular is popular because nearly all young people in the country can do the dance and the dancers can perform when advancing.

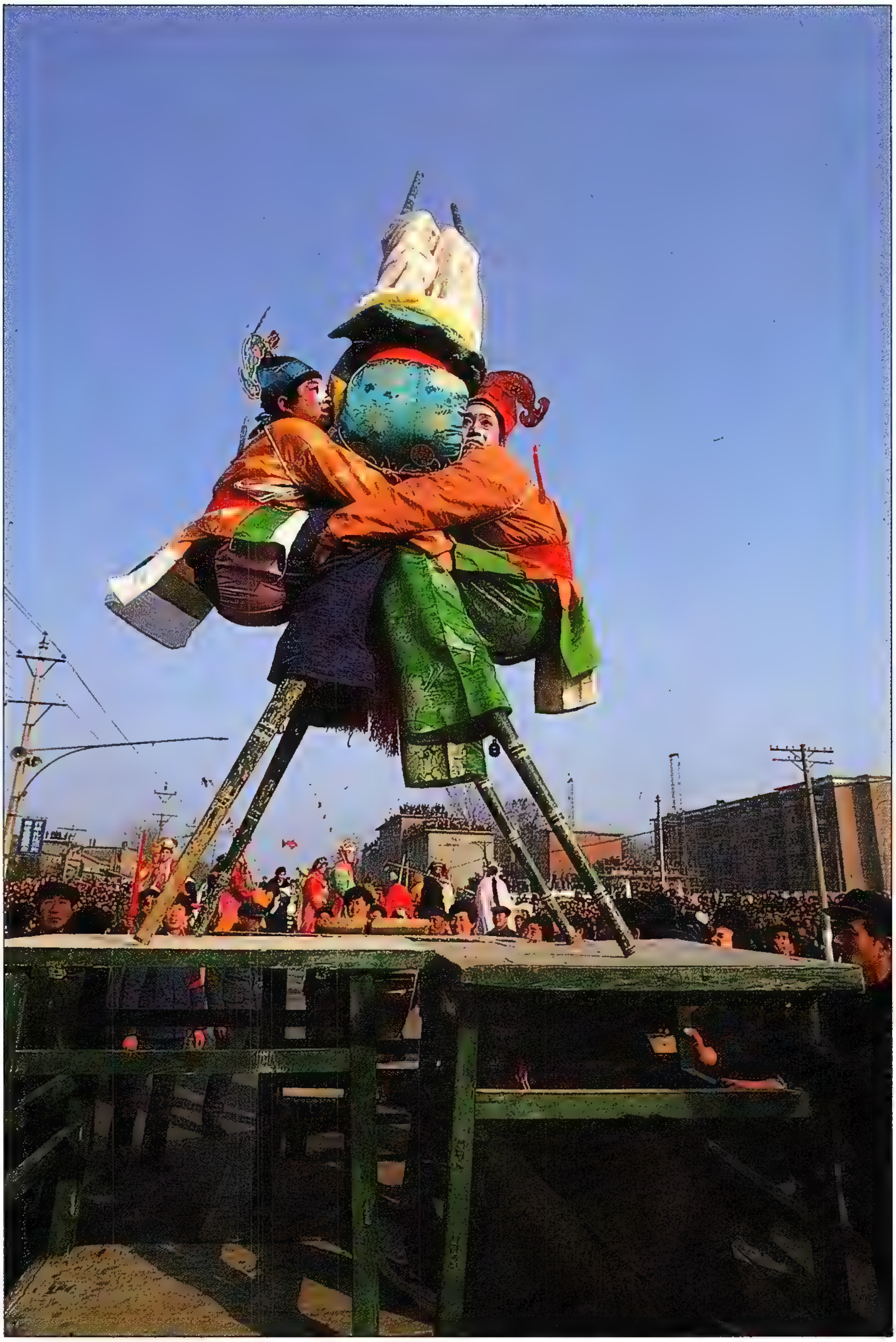
Born with local flavour, the *yangko* dance originated from primitive dances which farmers performed during the break when they transplanted rice seedlings (*yang* means seedling, and *ko* means song). During the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), the *yangko* dance became a dance executed in processions and festivals held in honour of local deities. The present artistic form took shape after the mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The *yangko* dance has two main varieties: one is called ground *yangko*, in which dancers perform on foot; and the other is described as *yangko* on stilts, which is more often referred to as stilt-walking and does not seem to be considered a kind of *yangko* dance. But in fact, there are quite a few similarities between the two – their roles, as well as their music, are the same. Yet in stilt-walking, performers walk on stilts about 1.5 metres high, consequently the dance is much more difficult than the *yangko* dance.

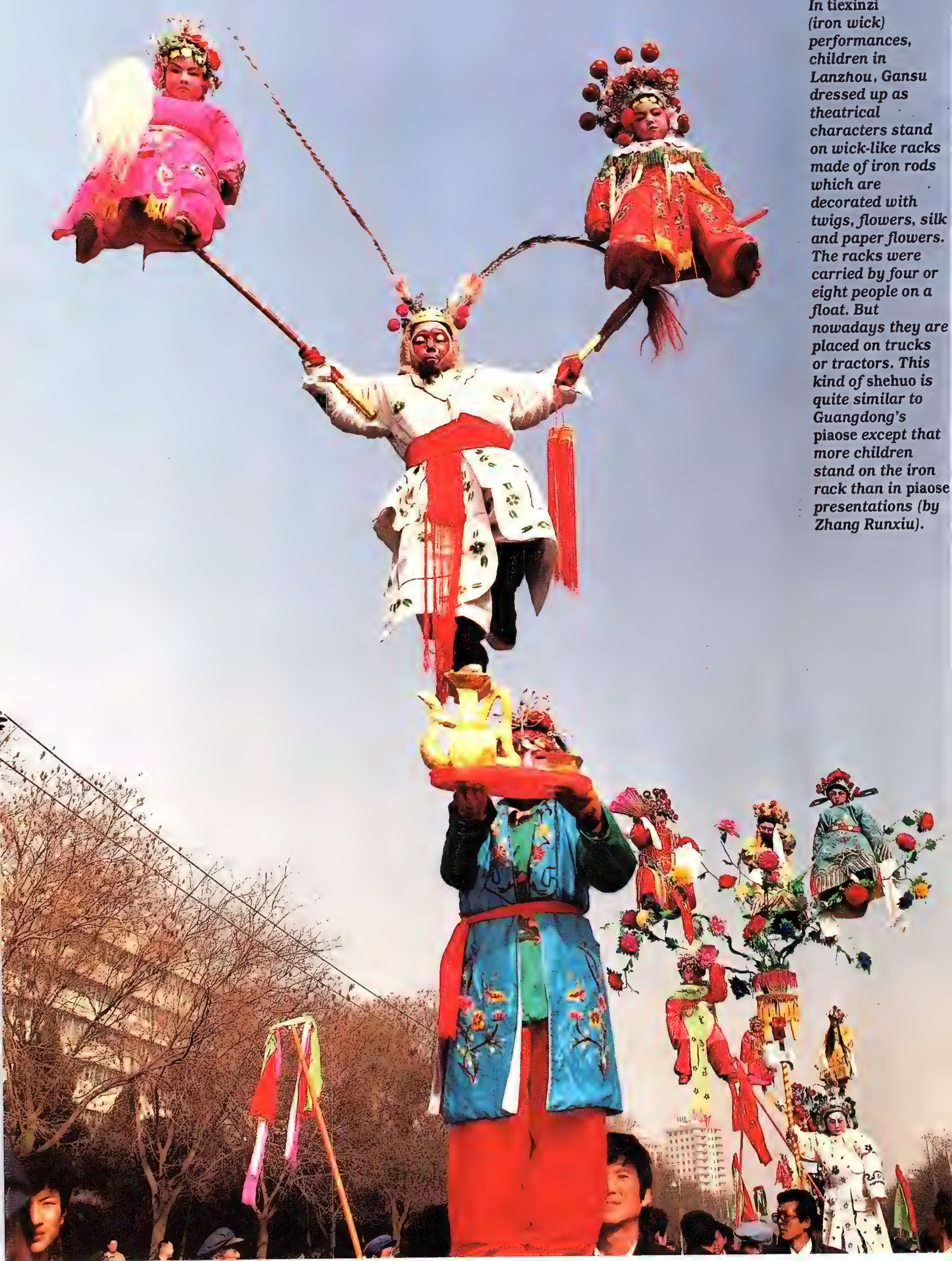
Stilt-walking is of two kinds according to the danger involved: civilian and military stilt-walking. The performance of the latter is intrepid and valiant, and its astounding range of movement include splits, tumbling, somersaults, handstands, leg-spinning, bending over backwards and vigorous turning. The performance of civilian stilt-walking emphasizes singing, figure footwork and waist-twisting. Performers of the *yangko* dance would dress up as ancient characters, mountain goblins and water goblins. They sing songs to tell interesting tales, stories about daily life, and romances about gifted scholars and pretty ladies.

The pageant to celebrate the New Year is usually headed by the arresting lion dance and the dragon dance. The deafening sound of gongs and drums creates a lively atmosphere. Next is the inspiring waist-drum team. It is followed by the performing groups of the *yangko* dance and stilt-walking, which are a feast for the eyes and ears. When the procession of platform *shehuo* arrives, the pageant reaches its climax, which truly delights everyone present.

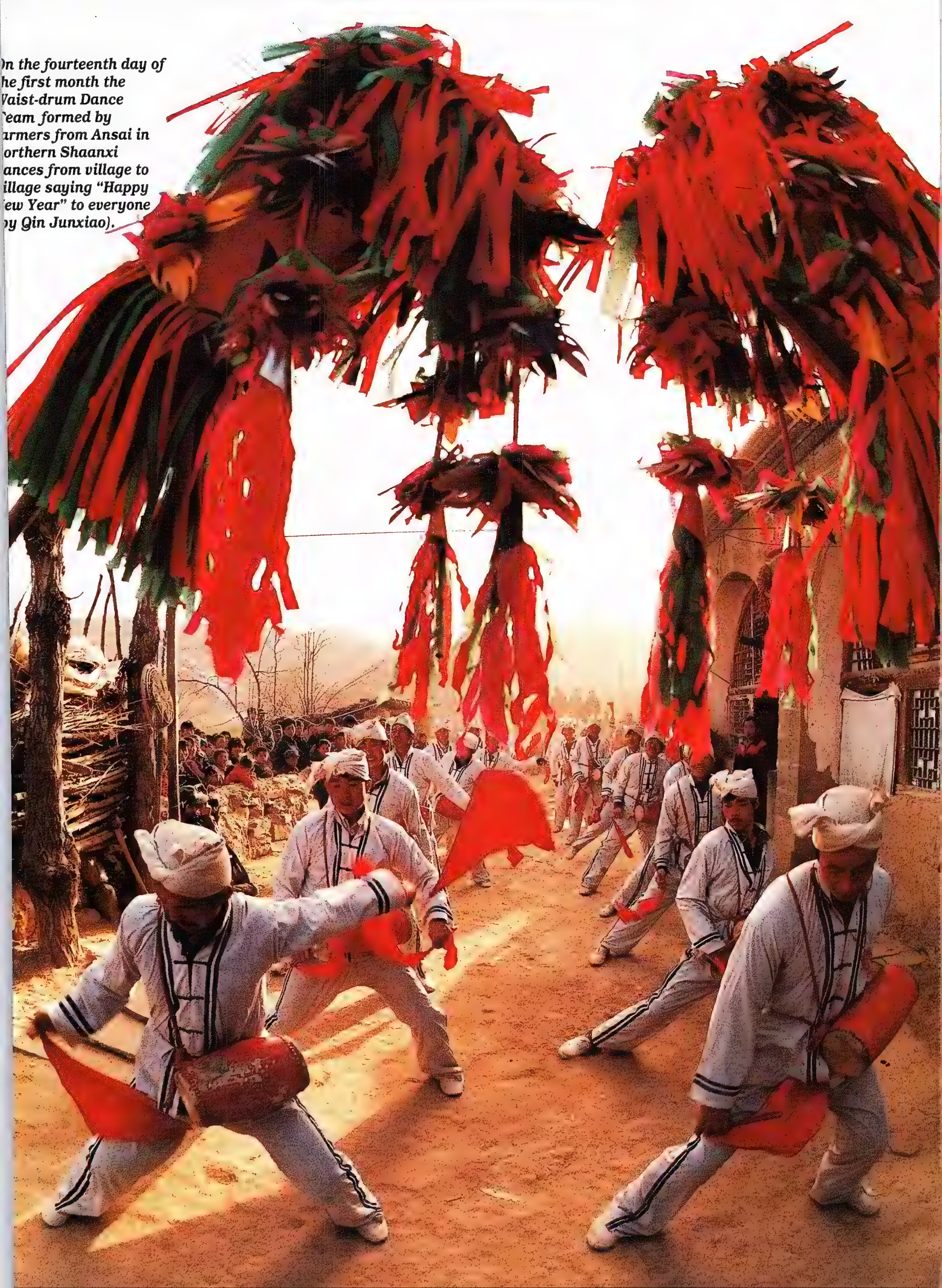
Translated by Chen Jiaji



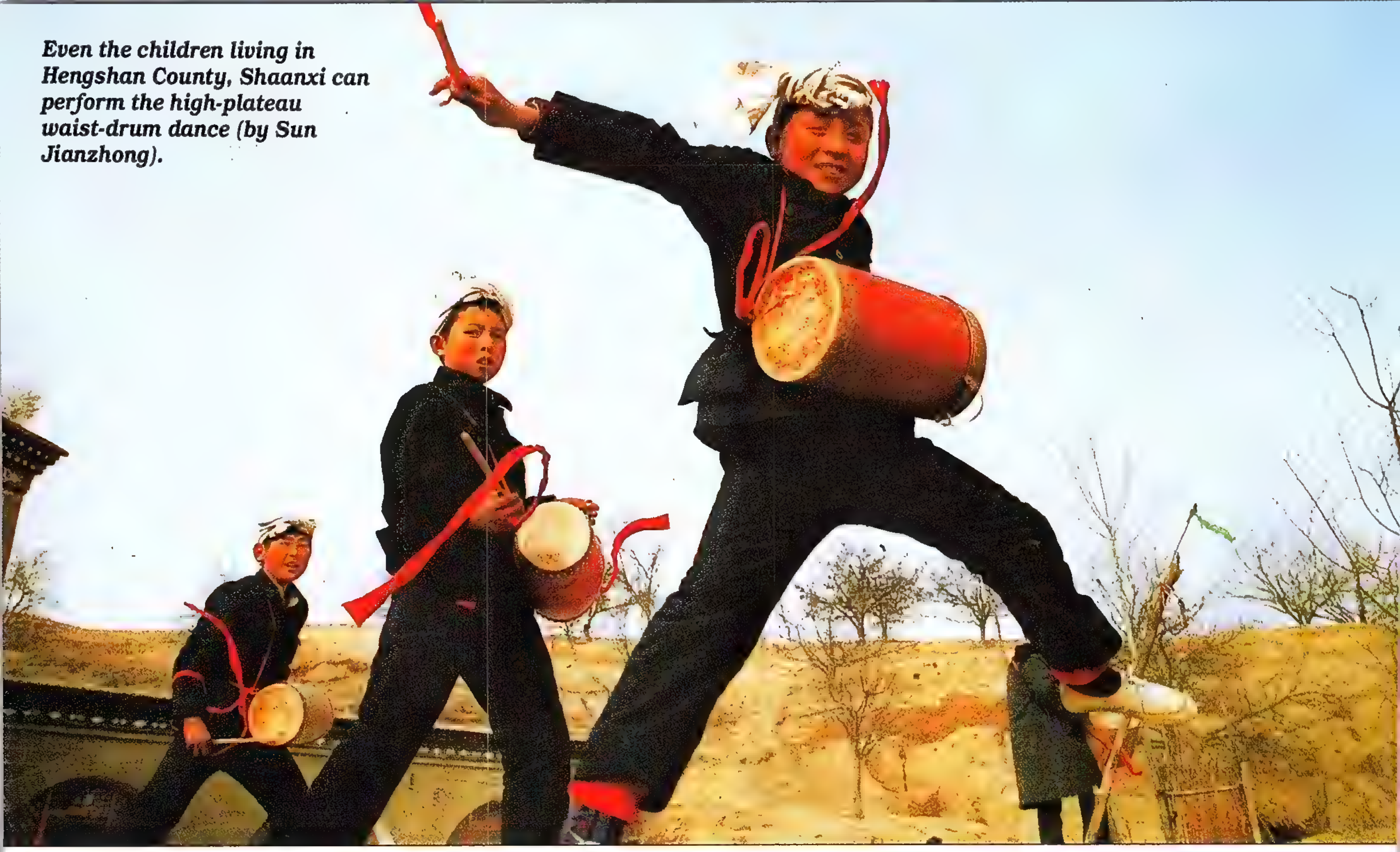
Hebei has a distinctive flavour of stilt-walking performed in Handan City. Three performers with their stilts more than a metre long form a pyramid on tables which are taller than a metre (by Liu Wenmin).



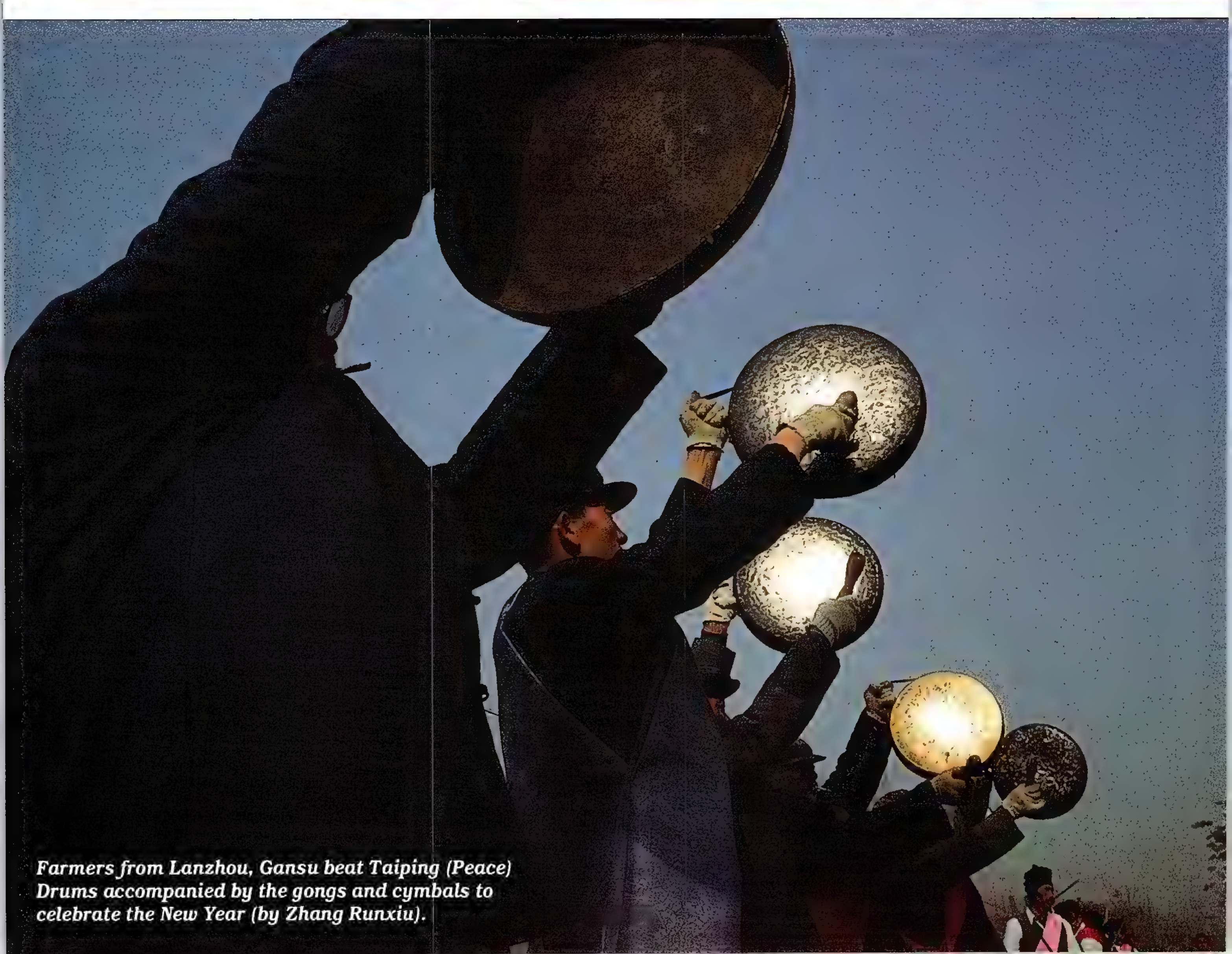
In tiexinzi (iron wick) performances, children in Lanzhou, Gansu dressed up as theatrical characters stand on wick-like racks made of iron rods which are decorated with twigs, flowers, silk and paper flowers. The racks were carried by four or eight people on a float. But nowadays they are placed on trucks or tractors. This kind of shehuo is quite similar to Guangdong's piaose except that more children stand on the iron rack than in piaose presentations (by Zhang Runxiu).



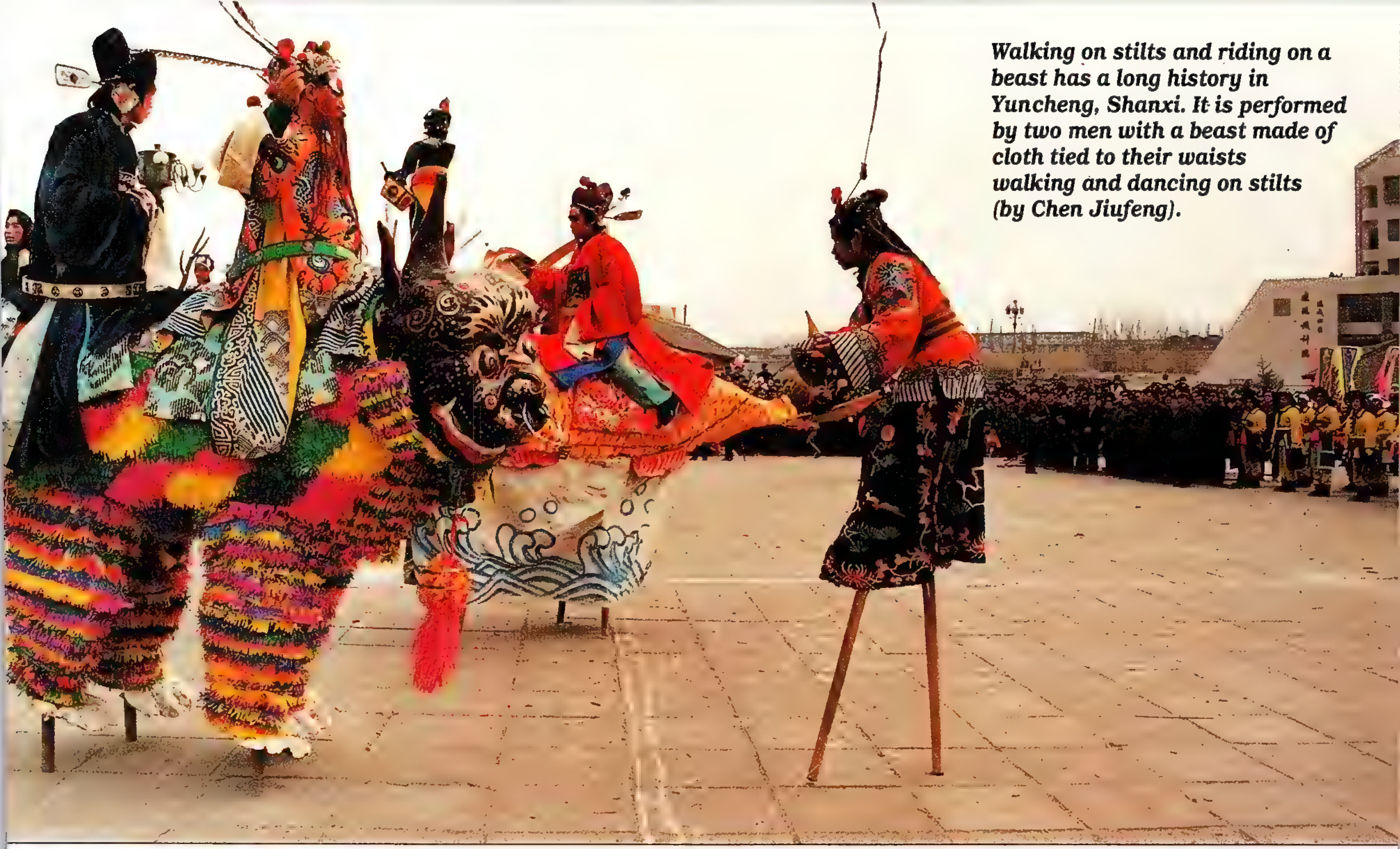
n the fourteenth day of he first month the aist-drum Dance eam formed by armers from Ansai in orthern Shaanxi ances from village to illage saying “Happy ew Year” to everyone y Qin Junxiao).



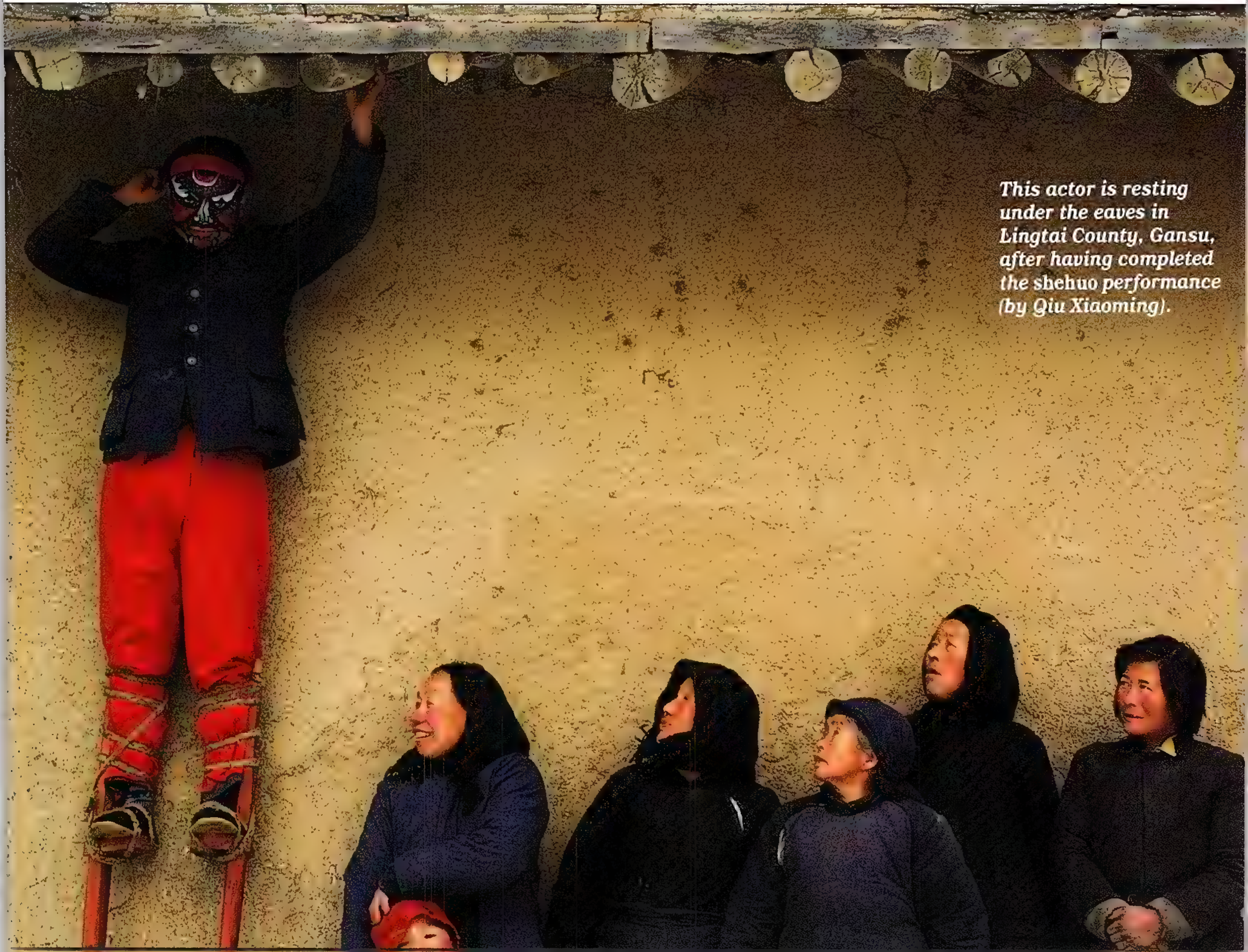
Even the children living in Hengshan County, Shaanxi can perform the high-plateau waist-drum dance (by Sun Jianzhong).



Farmers from Lanzhou, Gansu beat Taiping (Peace) Drums accompanied by the gongs and cymbals to celebrate the New Year (by Zhang Runxiu).

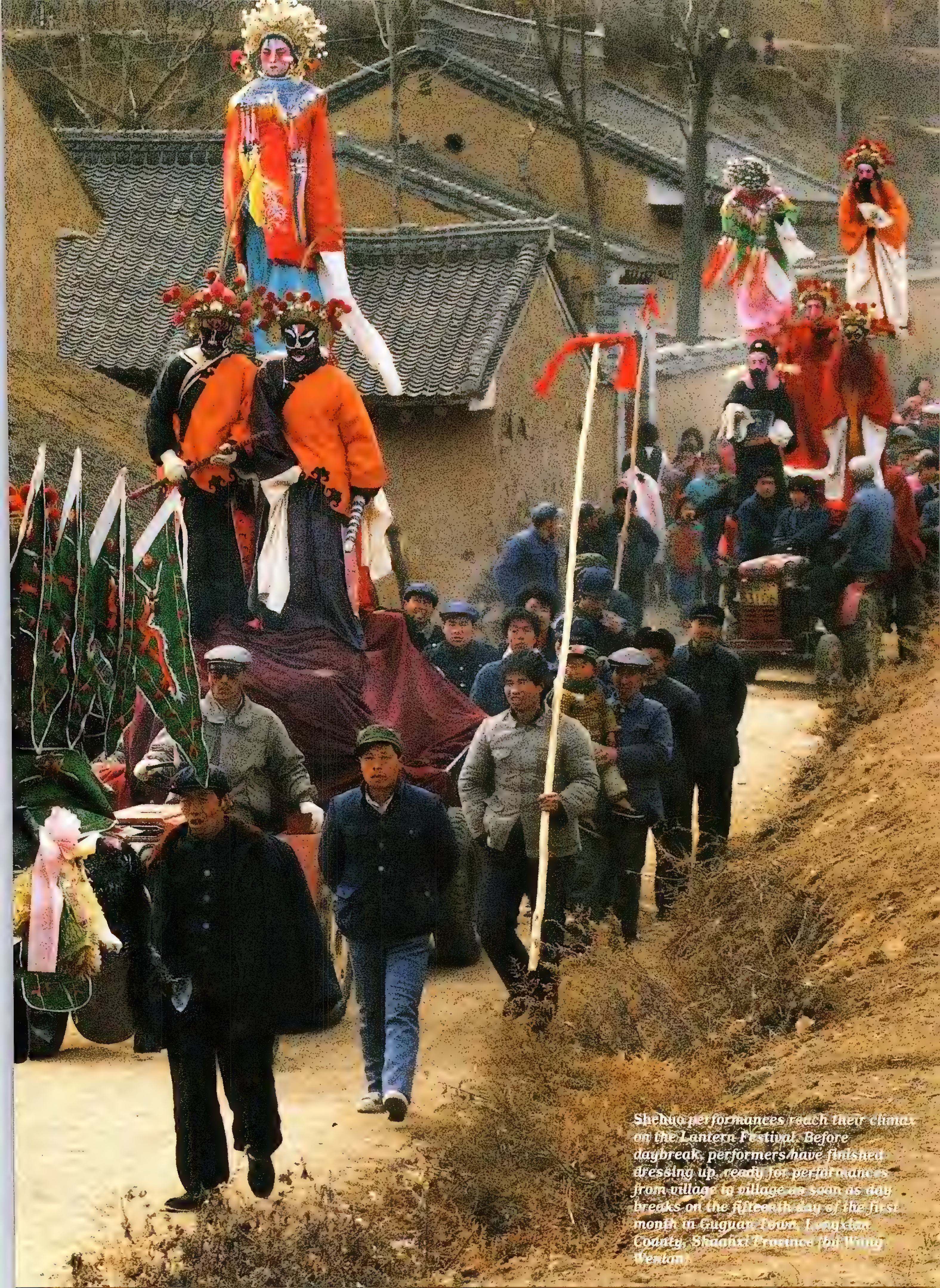


Walking on stilts and riding on a beast has a long history in Yuncheng, Shanxi. It is performed by two men with a beast made of cloth tied to their waists walking and dancing on stilts (by Chen Jiufeng).

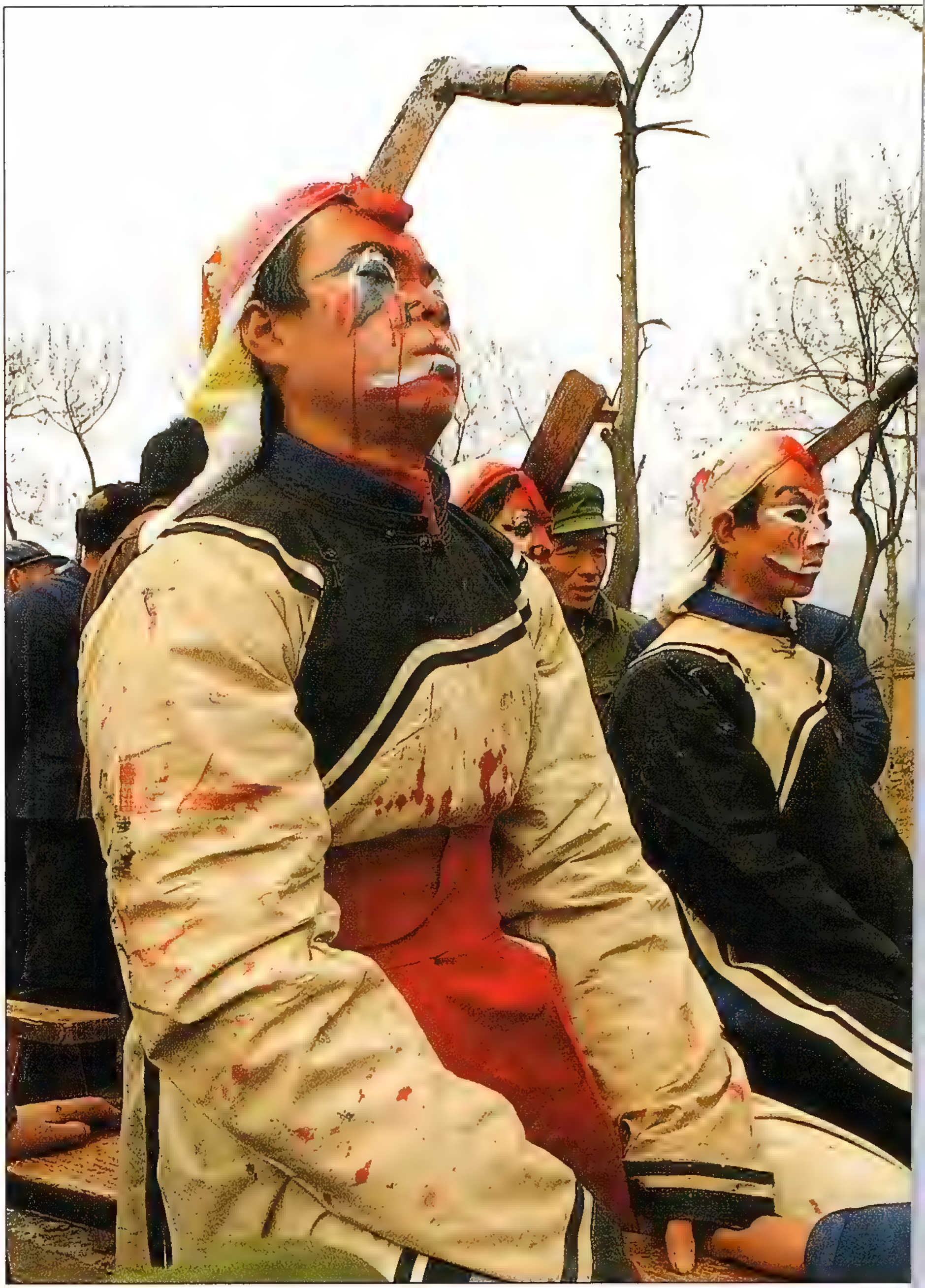


This actor is resting under the eaves in Lingtai County, Gansu, after having completed the shehuo performance (by Qiu Xiaoming).

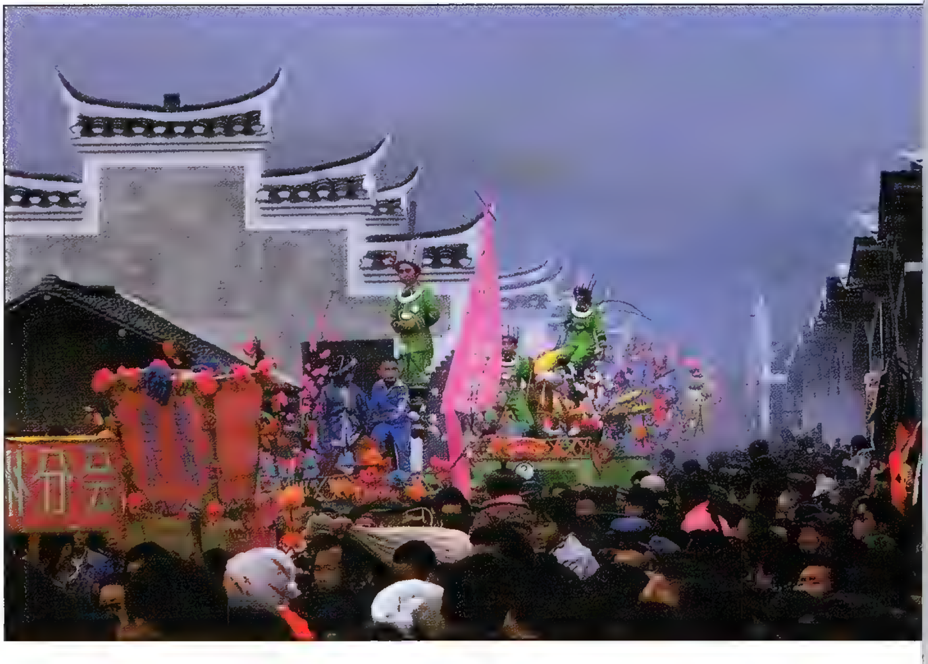
众志成城
四城能勤走天下



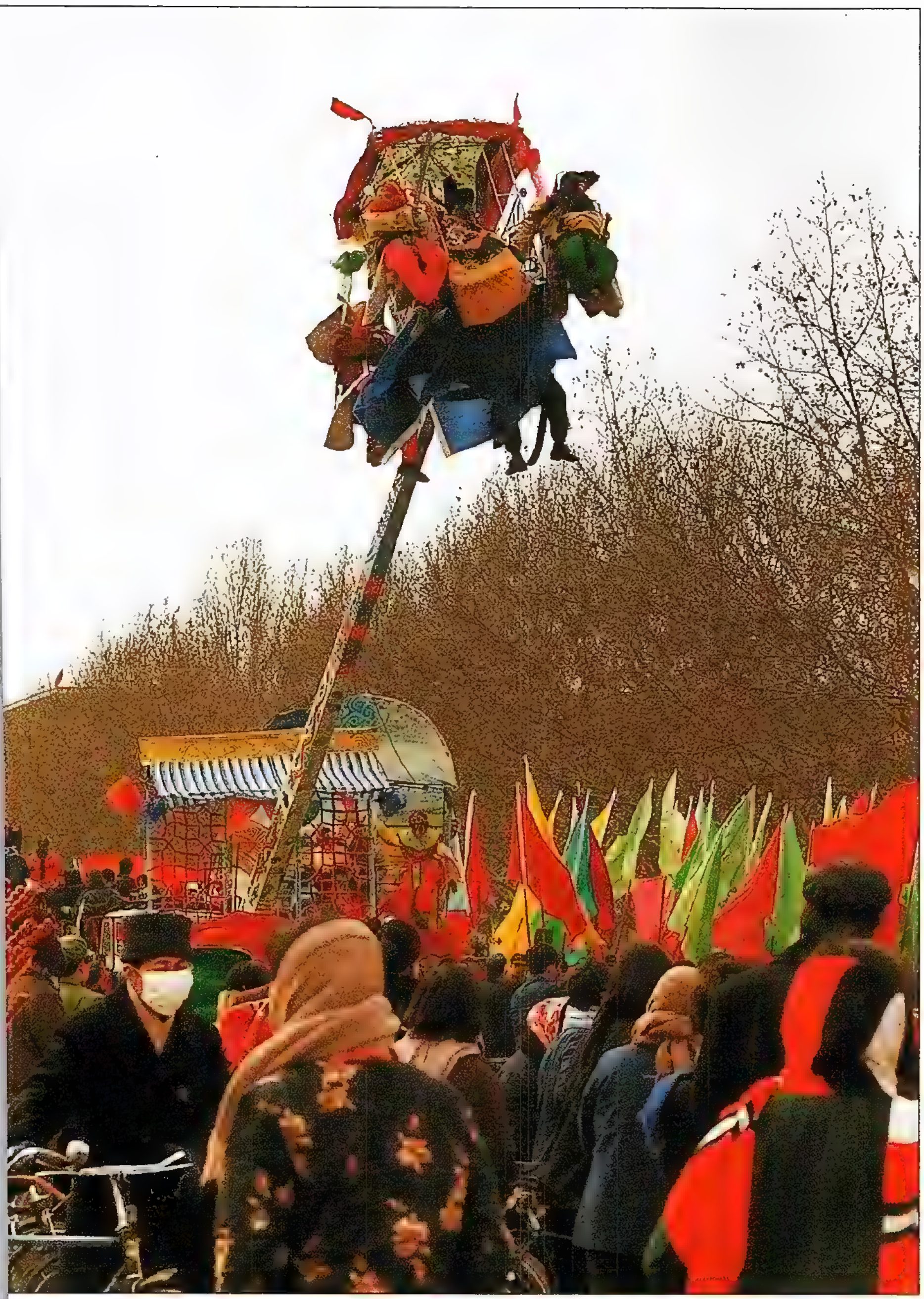
Shehuo performances reach their climax on the Lantern Festival. Before daybreak, performers have finished dressing up, ready for performances from village to village as soon as day breaks on the fifteenth day of the first month in Guguan Town, Longxian County, Shaanxi Province (by Wang Wenlan)



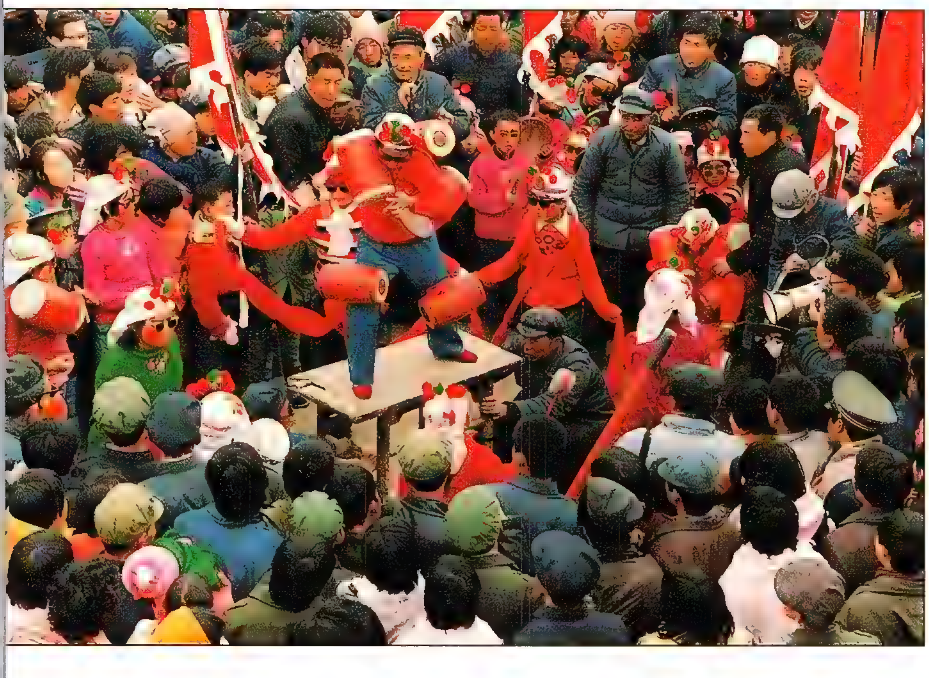
On the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the actors from Chisha, Baoji County, Shaanxi are executing the shehuo *performance named* kuaihuo. *They appear to be bleeding because they are recreating a scene featuring the hero Wu Song from the famous novel* Outlaws of the Marsh *taking revenge on Ximen Qing who killed Wu's elder brother (by Hu Wugong).*



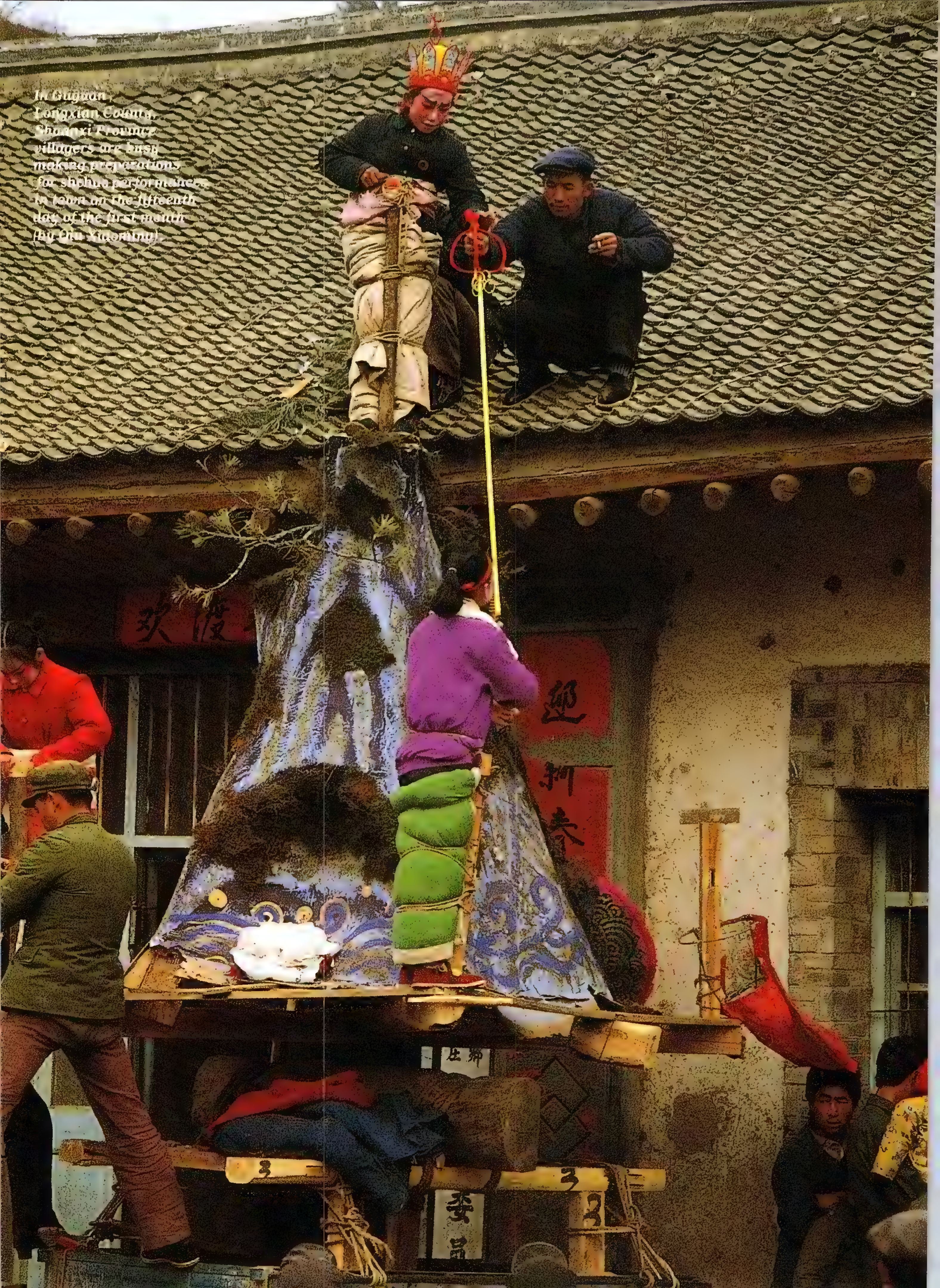
Ancient Qianzhou in western Hunan Province has long been famous for zachun *(a kind of* shehuo *performance) held on the ninth day of the first lunar month. These performances take historical and traditional stories, folk customs and contemporary lives as their themes. Young boys and girls chosen are dressed up and placed on small but high platforms (by Wu Tinghong).*



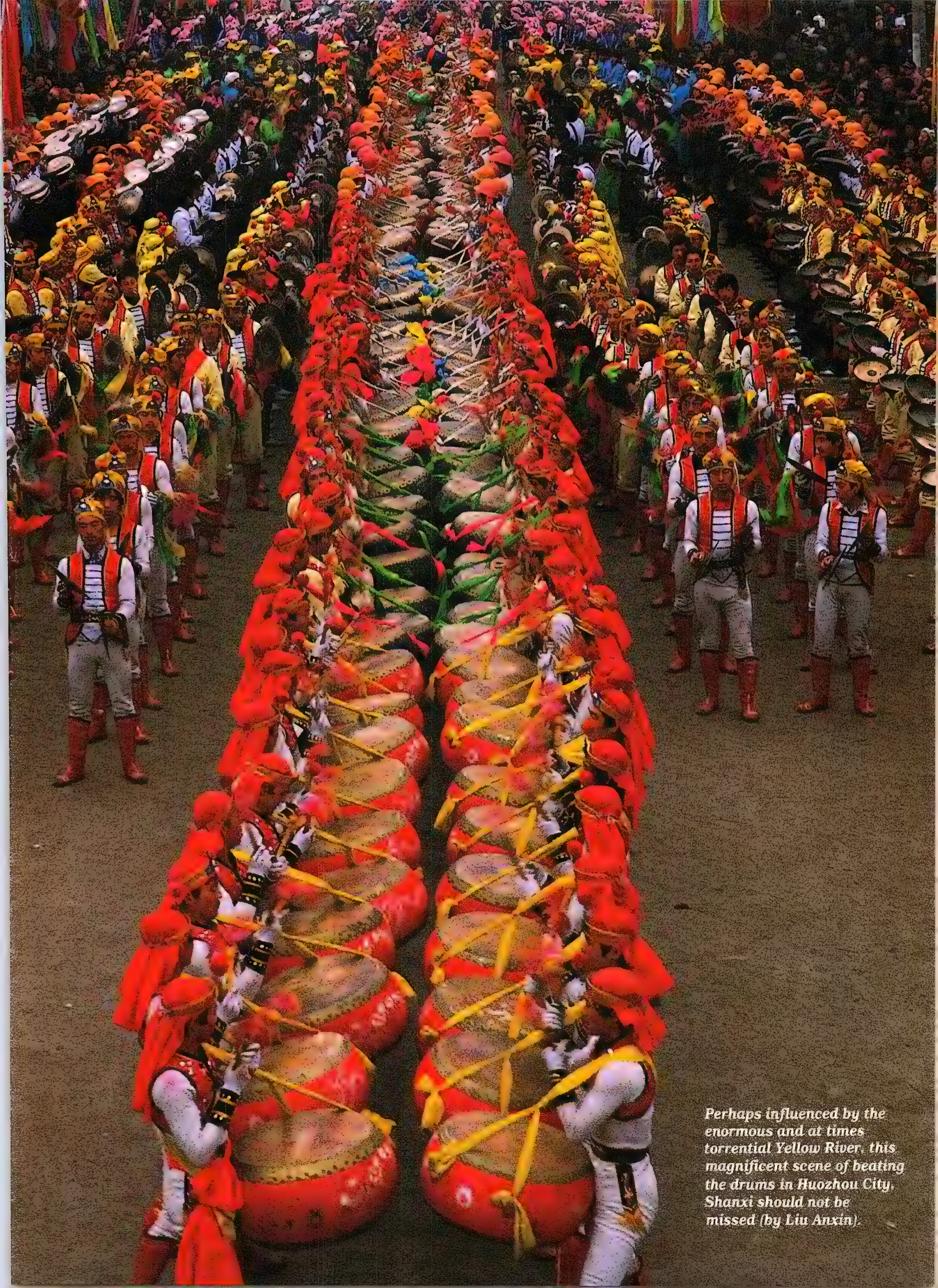
Huahui (Flower Show) is popular in the outskirts of Handan City, Hebei Province, between the thirteenth and the fifteenth days of the first lunar month. In the performance of huogan *which works on the lever principle, one or several performers on one end of the lever are sent up into the air when another or other performers land on the other end. They perform acrobatics in the air (by Wang Yunliang).*



In Wanrong County, Shanxi, during the Spring Festival, the people are giving the shehuo *performance called* Huaqiaogu *(many ways of beating the drums). The actor fastens the drums on the different parts of his body and beats them rhythmically (by Gu Di).*



In Guguan, Longxian County, Shaanxi Province villagers are busy making preparations for shehuo performances in town on the fifteenth day of the first month (by Qiu Xiaoming).



Perhaps influenced by the enormous and at times torrential Yellow River, this magnificent scene of beating the drums in Huozhou City, Shanxi should not be missed (by Liu Anxin).

A Propitious Snowfall Promises a Good Harvest

A propitious New Year is usually ushered in in the south with golden kumquats and colourful flowers, while in the north, ice and snow, more often than not, are the milieu.

In the north, snow is regarded as propitious because a timely snow augurs a good harvest. Snowfall during the transition of winter into spring is an indicator of the approach of spring ploughing and summer and autumn harvests. The Spring Festival period falls during the period of heavy snow, which is called "timely snow". The thicker the snow accumulates, the more water the soil absorbs when the snow melts in spring, which promotes a good harvest.

People in the north like snow. When the earth is covered with heavy snow, they celebrate the New Year with snow – they honour, admire, eat and play with and on ice and snow. The deep snow and thick ice provide good surfaces for many sports. The more popular ones include skiing, skating, sleighing, ice surfing and ice hockey. In some regions, people defy the cold weather and swim after cutting through the ice surface of a river or lake. Swimming in icy water has even become a rite of communion with ice and snow. The most vivid example of love for the icy world is the group wedding ceremony held on an ice-bound lake or a frozen river. Riding on sleighs, the young couples begin their happily married life right on the ice.

Children play with snow. They throw snowballs at one another, make snowmen, roll up snowballs, and make "ice monkeys" and skating carts. Besides commonly used ice skates, skating carts – an indigenous apparatus – are used in skating. A skating cart is also referred to as a skating bed, which is actually an enlarged ice skate. Sitting on a skating cart, the skater drives the cart forward by stabbing the two ice pitons onto the ice. The so-called "ice monkey" is actually a top made of ice. A player winds a whip onto an ice top and then throws the top onto the ice, which makes the top spin. The player then whips it to spin without stopping.

Of all the objects made of ice or snow, ice sculptures and ice lanterns are the most attractive.

As early as the mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when the New Year came, adults often made small ice lanterns for children to carry around. An ice lantern is made like this: Fill a vessel (a bucket, for example) with water and put the vessel in the cold open air for the water to freeze. When the outer part of the water has frozen, let out the water remaining in the central part. Then remove the hollowed-out ice lump from the vessel, insert a candle and attach a string and some ornaments onto the ice lump, and an ice lantern is made. The ice lantern originated as a practical invention by the fishermen living by the river. In winter when the rivers are ice-bound, fishermen would cut holes through the ice to catch fish by putting candles in ice lumps frozen in a bucket. These ice borers were the earliest ice lanterns.

In many regions in Northeast China, people make ice sculptures and ice lanterns during the Spring Festival. Harbin in Heilongjiang Province is the most famous for this activity.

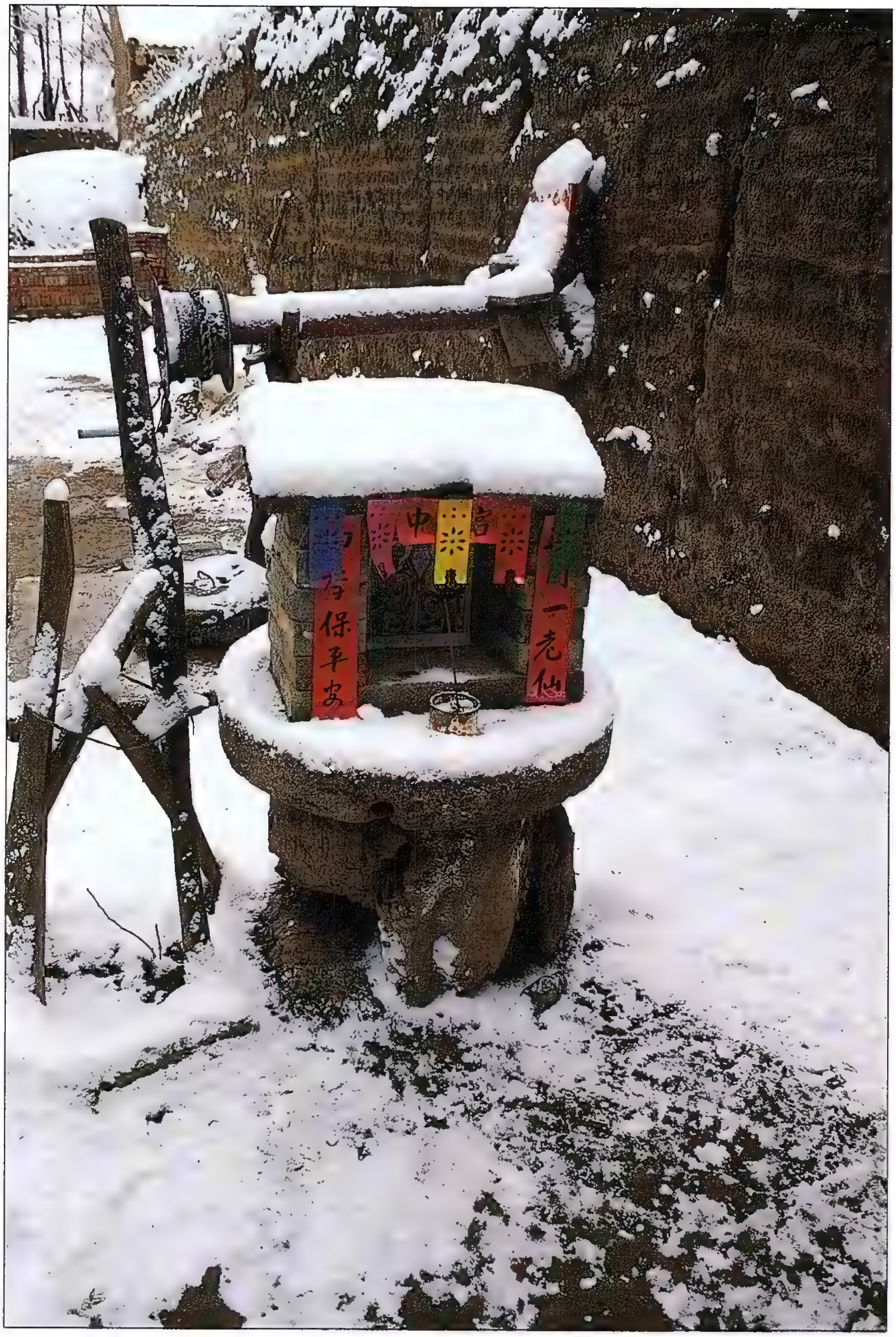
From its denotation the word "ice lantern" now connotes figures of ice and snow art. Solid blocks of ice with strong plasticity, which are hardly different from ordinary building materials in terms of compression strength, are cut from the frozen Songhua River. They are then shaped by electric saws into materials with different specifications in accordance with requirement of the design blueprint. Ice bricks or other basic shapes, after being processed again by carpenter's tools such as a plane, flat spade and so on, are cemented together with water to construct ice buildings, ice sculptures, ice miniature trees and rockery and other ice art genres. Having fashioned the ice into a beautiful structure people then apply multicoloured lights thus animating it and giving it character.

During the New Year, the renowned annual Ice and Snow Festival lasting nearly two months is held in Harbin. In Zhaolin Park in the city, ice sculptures with various motifs, including palaces, pavilions, figures, insects, fish, bridges, boats, birds and beasts are displayed. They are given beautiful names, such as Exquisite Pagoda, Peacock in His Pride, Jade Palace, Moon Palace, Ice Plum, Four Dragons Playing with a Pearl, Magpie Perching on a Plum and Prosperity Brought by the Dragon and Phoenix. Glittering, translucent and even dazzling, they are finely crafted with a high degree of skill and look like crystal or glass figures. Equipment is then used to cut ice blocks and to install wiring. Afterwards, ice blocks are cemented together with water and neon lights of various colours, ranging from red, yellow to blue, green and orange are installed so that all around becomes a truly magnificent winter wonderland.

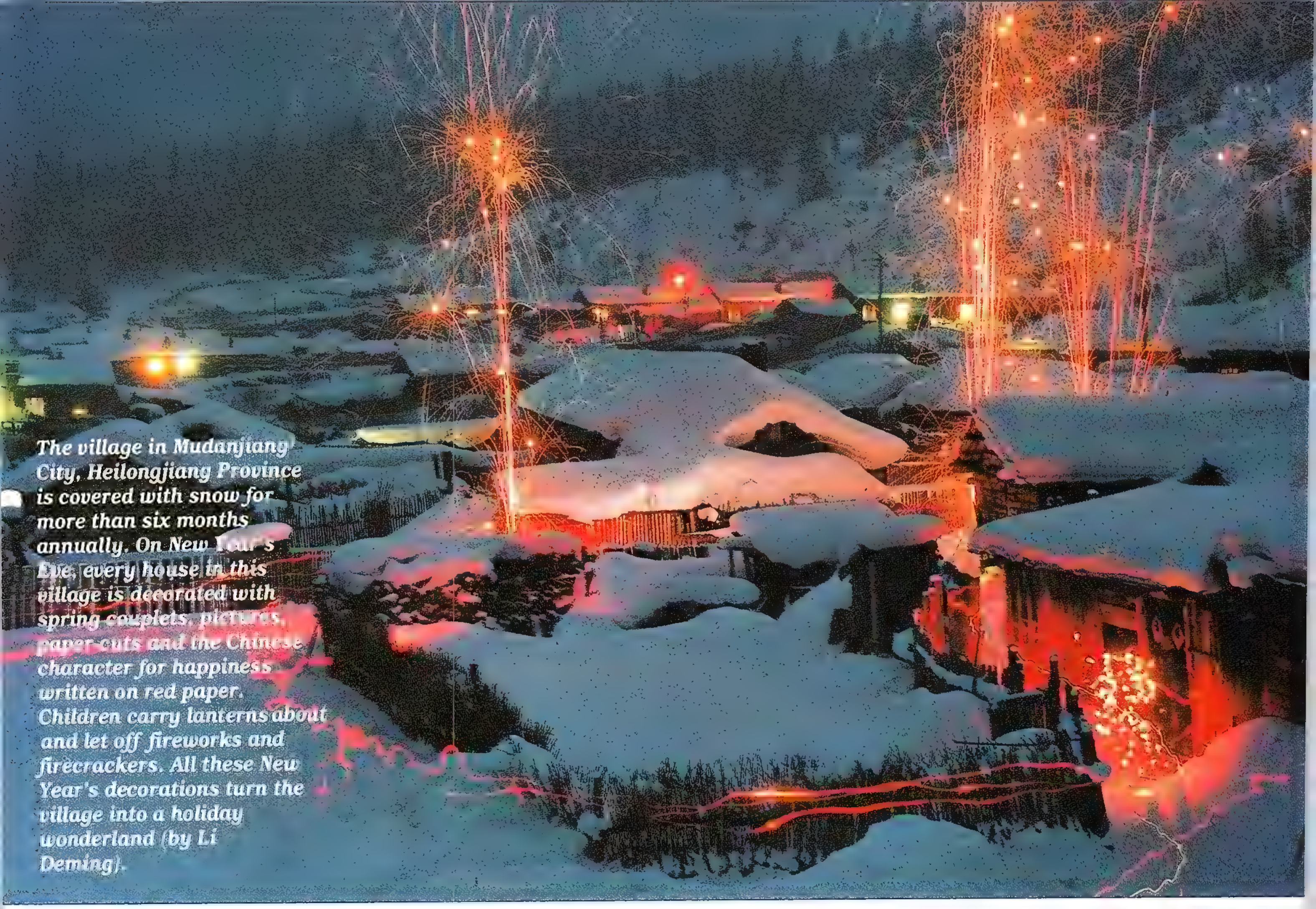
Some of the large ice masterpieces of towers, cities, bridges and sliding boards are life-sized, while others built on a grand scale are even larger than life. They can provide the setting for amusing oneself in a variety of ways such as "scaling the city walls", "crossing the bridge" or "playing on the sliding board".

Many of the smaller ones are produced simply by filling with water moulds made to specification. The frozen images are then further carved and decorated, with the finished result being a multitude of ice sculptures which can be used on sundry festive occasions. For an ice lantern according to the original definition of the word, a hole is bored in it with a scorching hot wire to attach a string handle. When a lamp is added, such a delicately fashioned ice lantern can be displayed in an exhibition, hung outside the door or carried along while taking part in the numerous ice sculpture and ice lantern parties often held in a park.

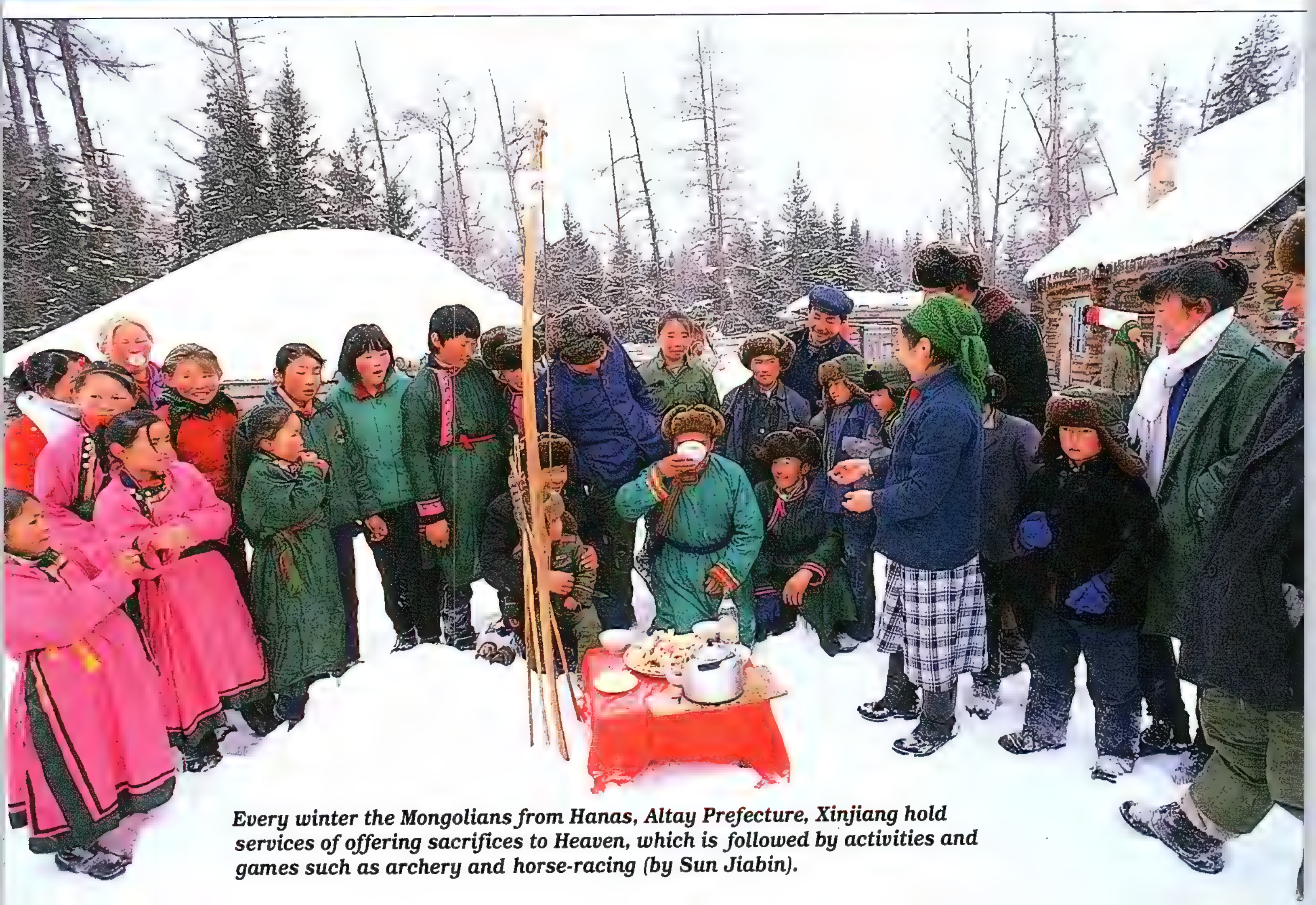
Translated by Chen Jiaji



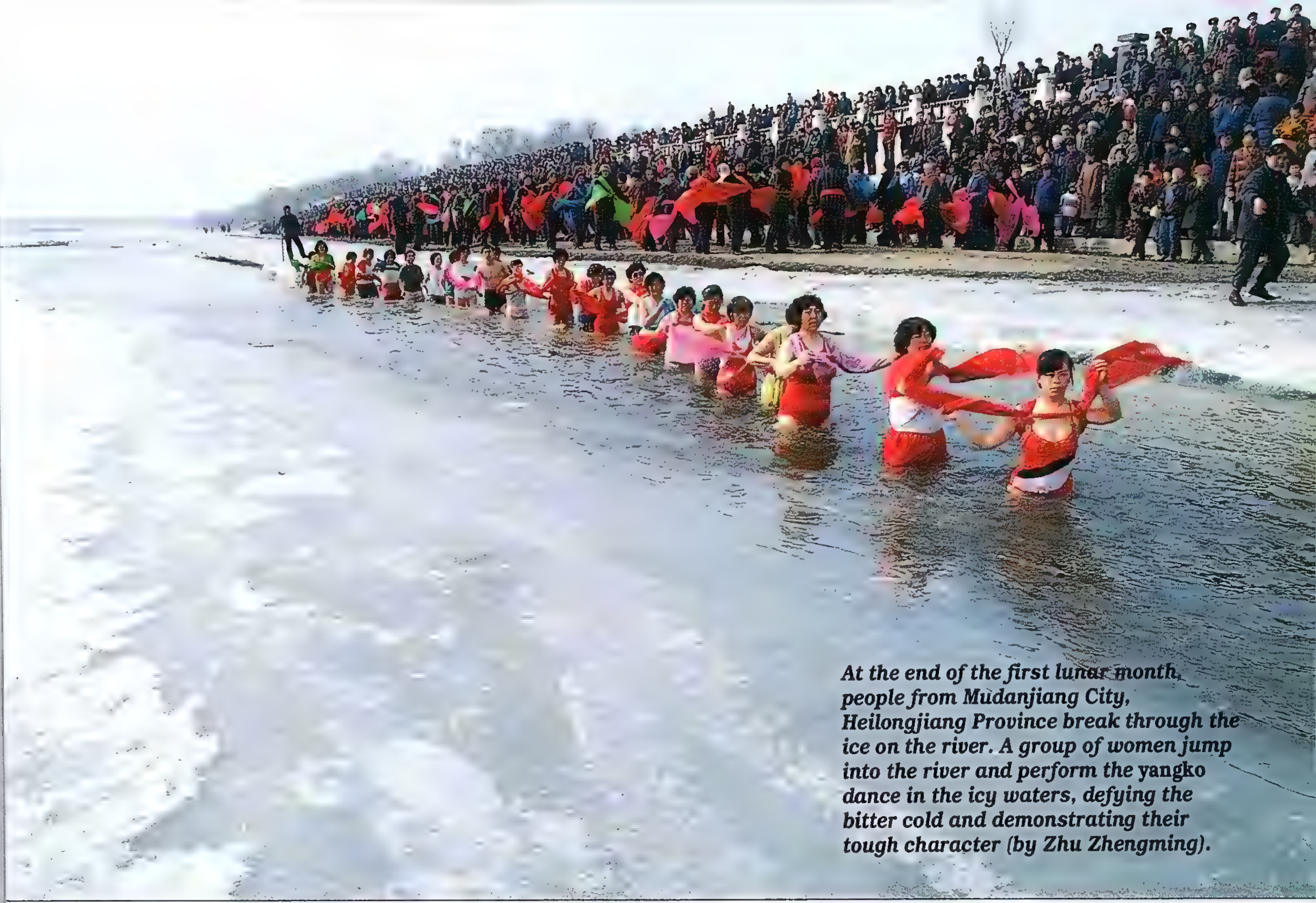
In rural areas in Shaanxi Province, shrines for door gods take many different forms. Most of the domestic articles can be used as building materials and there is no fixed assembly procedure for these materials. For example, in the Liunüjia Village, Fengxiang County, an abandoned millstone and some bricks and tiles form a distinctive platform shrine (by Shi Baoxiu).



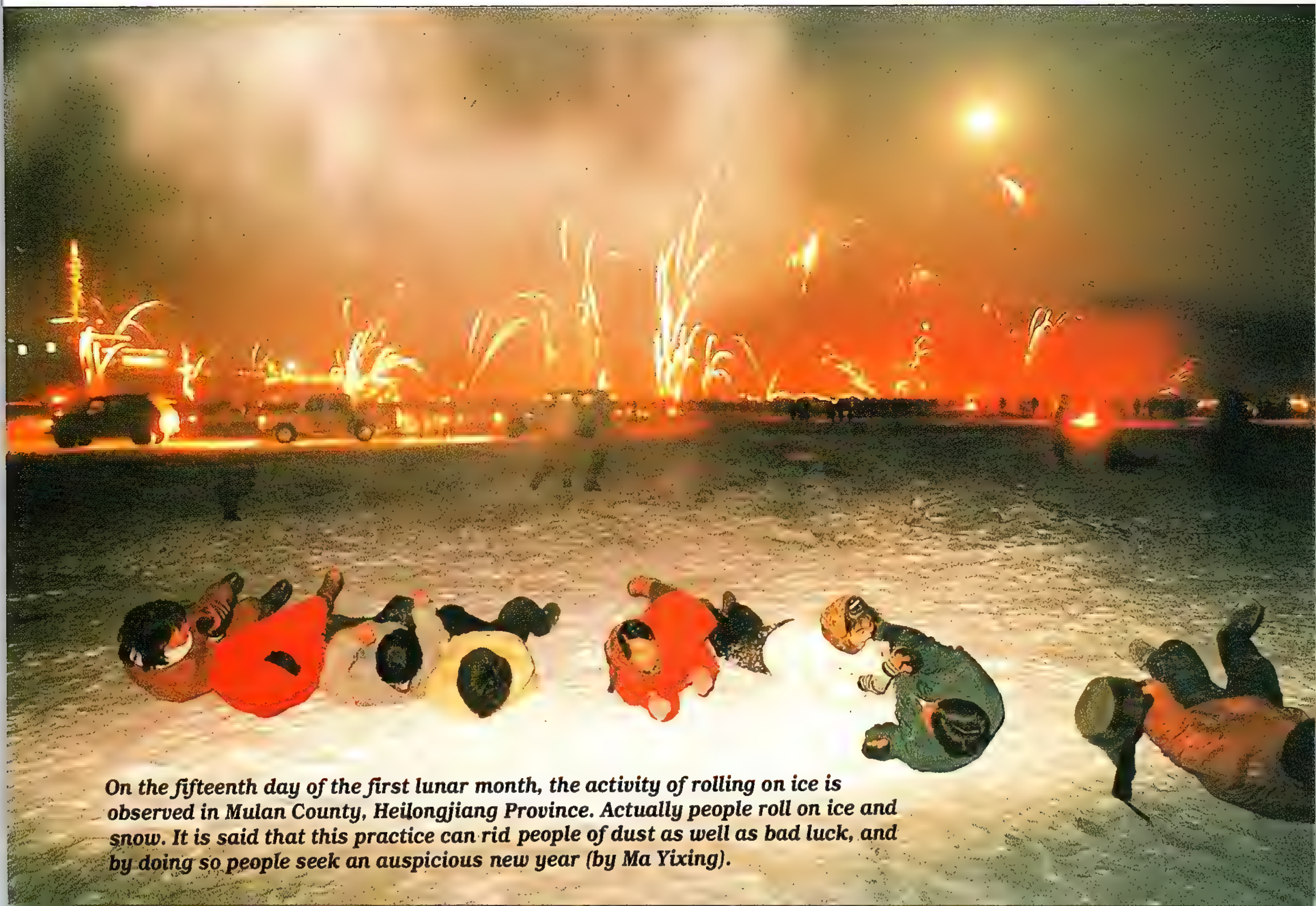
The village in Mudanjiang City, Heilongjiang Province is covered with snow for more than six months annually. On New Year's Eve, every house in this village is decorated with spring couplets, pictures, paper-cuts and the Chinese character for happiness written on red paper. Children carry lanterns about and let off fireworks and firecrackers. All these New Year's decorations turn the village into a holiday wonderland (by Li Deming).



Every winter the Mongolians from Hanas, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang hold services of offering sacrifices to Heaven, which is followed by activities and games such as archery and horse-racing (by Sun Jiabin).



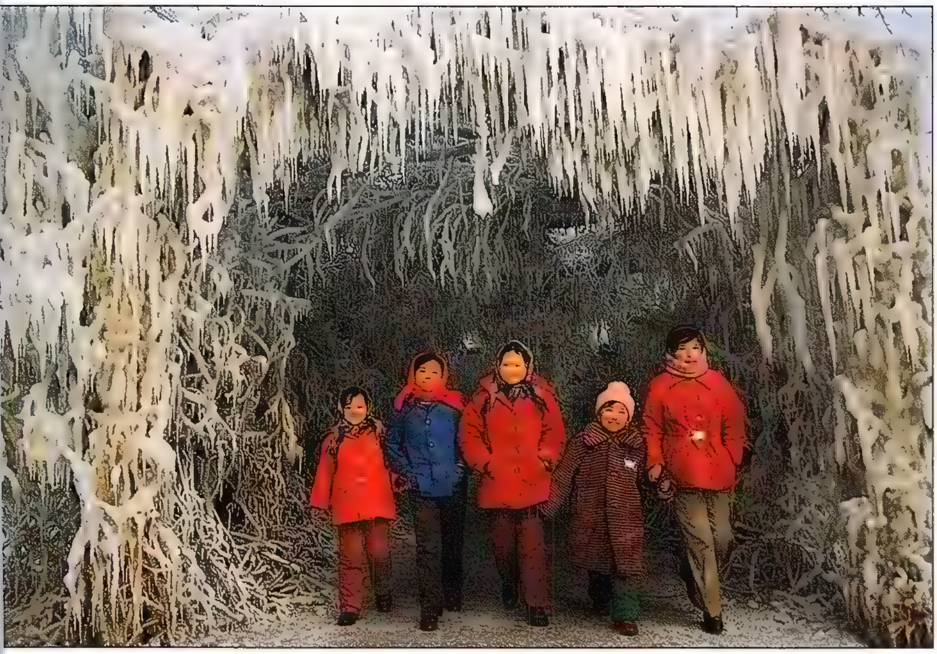
At the end of the first lunar month, people from Mudanjiang City, Heilongjiang Province break through the ice on the river. A group of women jump into the river and perform the yangko dance in the icy waters, defying the bitter cold and demonstrating their tough character (by Zhu Zhengming).



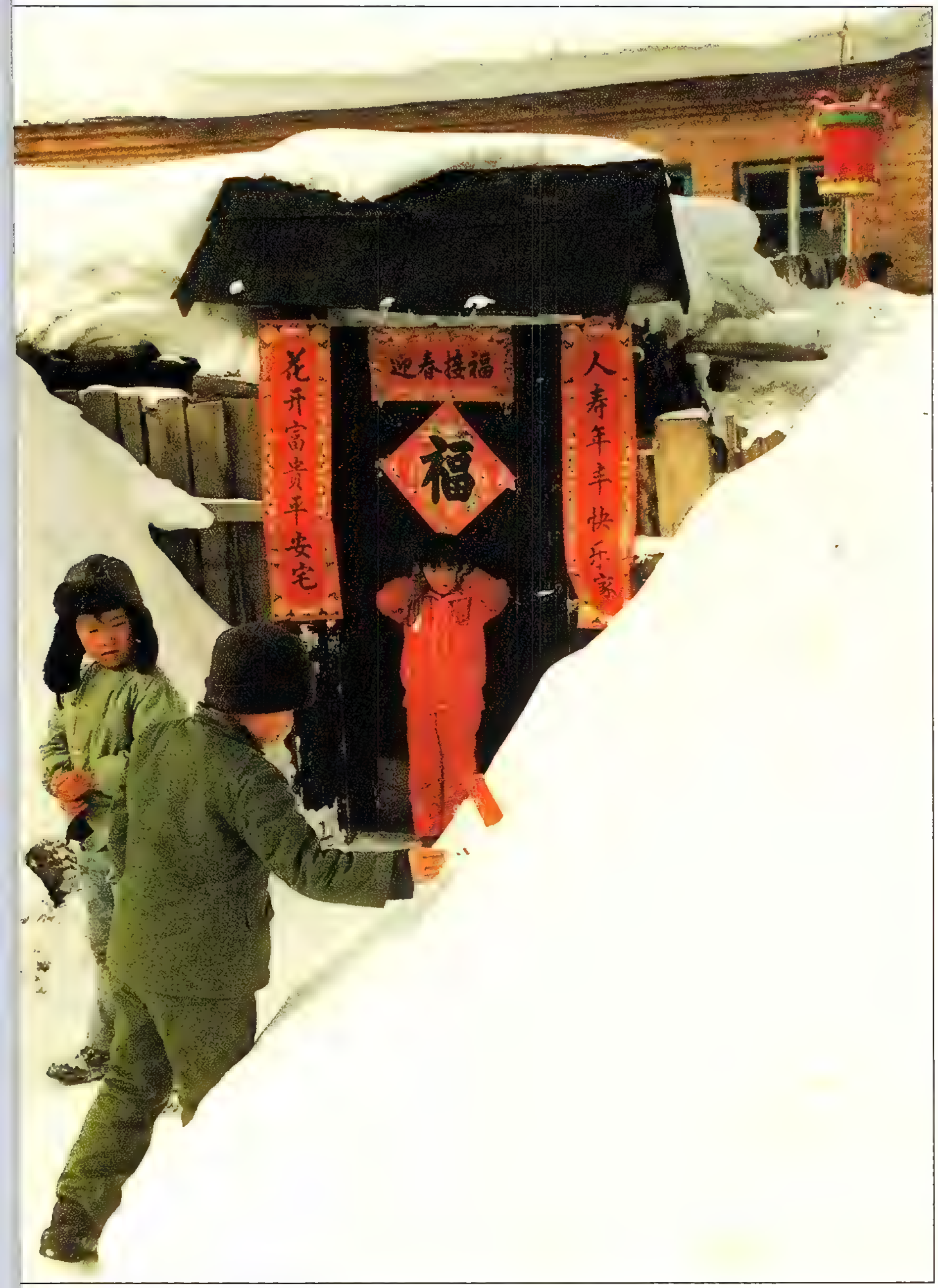
On the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the activity of rolling on ice is observed in Mulan County, Heilongjiang Province. Actually people roll on ice and snow. It is said that this practice can rid people of dust as well as bad luck, and by doing so people seek an auspicious new year (by Ma Yixing).

Children are beaming with the joy of seeing snow during the New Year festival in Urümqi, Xinjiang (by Song Shijing).

The renowned annual Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin is held during the Spring Festival. The activities include going to ice lantern garden parties, and attending group weddings held in areas where ice and snow recreational activities take place (by Zhang Cheng).



During the New Year period, an ice sculpture and ice lantern show is held in the People's Park in Urümqi, Xinjiang. Children merrily stroll through this ice palace (by Song Shijing).


迎春接福
福
花开富贵平安宅
人寿年丰快乐家

The festive atmosphere of New Year prevails in this snow-covered village in Mudanjiang City, Helongjiang Province, which used to be a habitation for people who came from Shanhaiguan Pass and made a living as wood-cutters. Unlike their forebears, the children are all natives of this land (by Song Hongyan).

Spring Festival, the Happiest Holidays for Children

The happiest and most treasured Spring Festival holidays are those which occurred during one's childhood.

An expert on folklore thus described his memories for the Spring Festival when he was a child: "A lot of special food to enjoy, a lot of new things to see.... Everyone was in his colourful Sunday best. Walking or playing, I felt that I was in an atmosphere at once mysterious yet happy. The joy, which was exalted and serene, seemed to be spread around the world by a fairy. The various activities and customs seemed to be fixed by heaven and no alterations were allowed."

Holidays for Children, Burden for Adults

The reason why the Spring Festival holidays are the happiest holidays for children, just like Christmas is for their counterparts in the West, is that in their childhood, children are still innocent about the world and are thus carefree. Since the final month of the previous lunar year, adults have been in a burdened and worried state completing the seemingly endless jobs – winter food storage and preservation after the autumn harvest, doing Spring Festival shopping, earning money for the festival and what not. Children for their part have been counting the days and looking forward to the early arrival of the holidays. To them, the Spring Festival means new clothes, firecrackers, money wrapped in red paper given to them as the New Year gift, strings of dates round the neck, windwheels and various games, which are all that their little hearts desire.

The New Year brings with it all the things children have anticipated with great expectation. In addition, they experience many new adventures, including going to the exciting temple fair with adults, watching lively dances and village theatrical performances, paying New Year's calls to relatives, making merry in the bridal chambre, and carrying colourful lanterns on the evening of the Lantern Festival. It is truly a measure of heaven on earth for children to take part in all these events.

The Roles of Children in *Shehuo* Performances

During the New Year, although it is a time of celebration for one and all, the behaviour of adults is somewhat constrained by numerous taboos which apply to the New Year. Children, however, are more or less exempt from these restrictions, and often are not even scolded by their parents after violating such restrictions. In addition, many of the customs which were originally practised by adults during this time are now the purview of children.

An interesting example of this is found in *shehuo* performances as rendered today. In the parade of *shehuo* performers, the highest part of the small portable platform is usually manned by children. Because of their light weight, two or more children recreating the role of heroes or fairies can be supported by a strong man below.

Being selected for roles in *shehuo* performances is considered to be a great event for the family and to bring good fortune and healthy growth onto himself or herself. Though firmly bound to the platform for a few hours during the parade, the brave but proud children will not complain to their parents about their discomfort, especially if delicious candies and desserts are being incessantly passed to them or after receiving loud applause for their efforts.

Children, the Hope of the Future

While *shehuo* represents the most vivid example of the important role of children during these holidays, the youngest generation is also involved in many of the ceremonies such as offering sacrifices to ancestors and worshipping gods where they feel they are directly communicating with the gods in Heaven amidst the almost surreal mysterious atmosphere brought on by the celebrations.

Many of the customs practised during this time are exclusively for the benefit of children, for example, money wrapped in red envelopes, clay toys, cloth toys, dough figures, attractive tiger-head embroidery hats and shoes. Other practices, such as to take a man or a woman as one's nominal father or mother, *labaobao* in Chinese, are generally reserved for the sixteenth day of the first month. On this day, children are carried by their parents to the front of the local Confucian Temple where a new "father" or "mother" is sought for children in the hope of securing healthy growth and good fortune in the future. Children in China traditionally are especially cherished and naturally are the centre of attention during the New Year activities for both adults and children. This is appropriate because people place their hopes for the future on children as well as on the coming New Year.

Translated by Chen Jiaji

Before the performance, children from Qilihe, Lanzhou City, Gansu Province rehearse on the thirteenth day of the first month in their costumes (by Zhang Runxiu).

Grand Buddhist rituals including sutra chanting, ceremonial dances and Tibetan operas are held in front of the main hall of the Labrang Monastery in southern Gansu on the thirteenth day of the first month. Tibetan children in their Sunday best attend the grand ceremonies with their parents (by Cao Wu).

While watching the New Year's Lion Dance in Beijing, this foreign child cannot resist playing with the lion (by Cheng Weidong).

School children from Lishi County, Shanxi Province dressed up as ancient government officials are going to give street performances on the fourteenth day of the first lunar month (by Shan Xiaogang

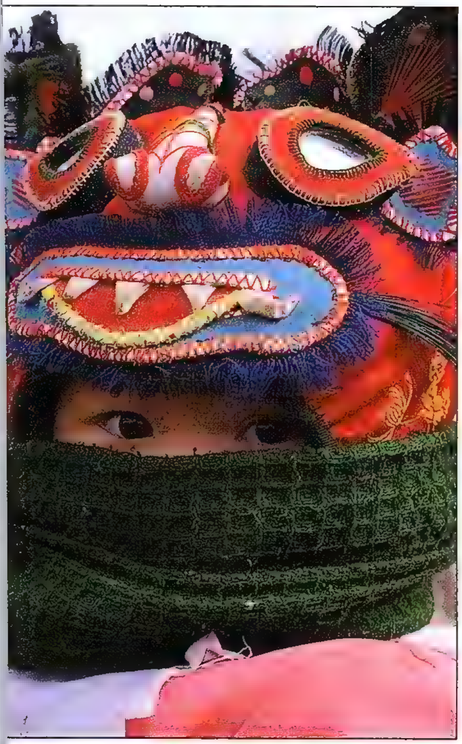
On the sixteenth day of the first lunar month in Guanghan City, Sichuan Province, every year people here engage in an activity called labaobao *(finding a guardian), in which parents take their children here to find a guardian* (baobao)*. If a parent of a child comes near a stranger in the crowd, they would offer the child in his arms. It is thought that this guardian would protect the child from illness and ensure healthy growth of the child (by Wang Miao).*

On the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, this boy is dressed up as a young master of the house in ancient China – an image often depicted in New Year pictures from Yangliuqing in Tianjin (by Feng Weilie).

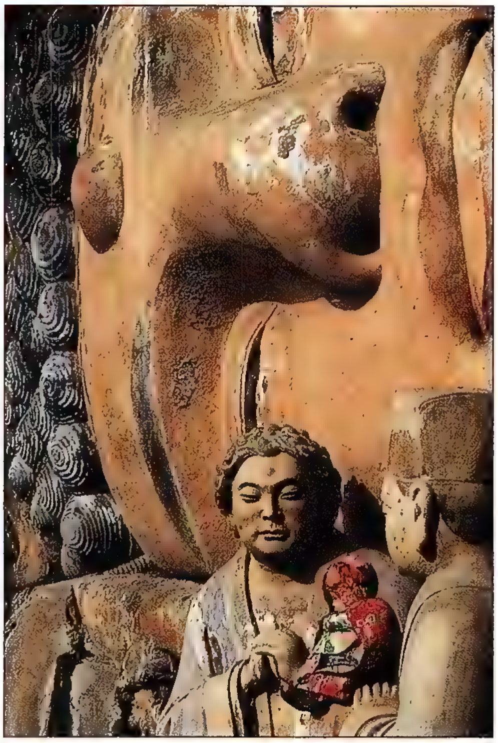
GEMS OF FOLK ART
楊柳青木版年畫
Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Pictures
四大民間年畫之首
楊柳青

Around the suburbs of Fengcheng County, Jiangxi Province, this older woman smiles when she meets her grandchild paying a visit to her (by Sheng Zhiti).

Amidst gong beats and boatmen's songs on the fifth day of the first month in Zhijiang County, Hubei Province, children are playing with colourful boats as they pay New Year's house calls (by Li Mingliang).



eople from Lingtai County, Shanxi rovince are in the habit of letting heir children wear tiger-head hats. They believe that these caps protect hildren from evil spirits. They also ope that their children will be as trong as powerful tigers by Liu Yang).



A villager is placing the child on the statue of Buddha in the Dazu Grottoes, Sichuan Province, hoping it would bring blessings to the child (by Wang Wenlan).

Joy Between Gods and People

In an agricultural society like China, nature, a vital contributing factor for good harvests, is given particular attention. The flourishing of agriculture and animal husbandry of the family unit is determined, apart from co-operation with nature, by hard work and adequate manpower. Therefore, the souls of the ancestors, who are believed to ensure the flourishing population of their posterity, are highly honoured. For this purpose, in ancient times, emperors built the ancestral temples, such as the Temple of Heaven, the Temple of Earth and the Altar of Agriculture. In private households, wooden tablets of the God of Heaven and the God of Earth were enshrined and worshipped. The belief of homage to gods and appeasement to ghosts is deeply ingrained in people's minds.

Within each year, farmers have to pass through an easy period when crops have been reaped, and a relatively difficult time when the storage of food peters out. On the festivals after a good harvest, the usually frugal people would have grand celebrations. On such occasions, they would express their gratitude to the God of Heaven, the God of Earth, and ancestors as well as solicit their blessings and protection. Their sacrificial ceremonies are solemn and elaborate. Only then would they feel at ease. Not surprisingly, those grand ceremonies originated from ancient times and were strictly religious. But as time passed, its original purpose was gradually de-emphasized while amusement and entertainment in these celebrations became more and more significant.

No matter how those customs have evolved, the New Year is the time for communion between gods, ghosts and human beings. On this festival, people are more aware than any other time of the respect due to ancestors and the importance of clans.

It is said that on New Year's Eve, gods descend from Heaven to earth. Traditionally, people get ready to greet them by burning joss-sticks and candles in front of the wooden tablets with names of the gods and their ancestors on them.

The God of Wealth, the Most Welcomed Deity

Of all deities, the God of Wealth is the most welcome. In the old days, the cry of "Please come and greet the God of Wealth" could be heard from time to time in the streets of Beijing as the year drew to its close, while pedlars sold portraits of the God of Wealth from door to door. On hearing their call, people would immediately come out to buy the portrait, which was considered an auspicious symbol of a wealthier new year. The fifth day of the New Year marked the birthday of the God of Wealth and people once again would hold a service to pay homage to him.

Who exactly is the God of Wealth? There are various interpretations as to his identity. One widely accepted is that the God of Wealth refers to Zhao Xuantan, also known as Zhao Gongming or Marshal Zhao. He is, it is said, one of the Taoist deities. His identity had in fact changed many times in history. At first, he was a deity in the nether world, then became the God of Plague. After the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) Dynasties, he was considered one of the five gods of plague. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), he turned out to be one of the eight marshals of ghosts. Because of his crime of slaughtering tens of thousands of people, he was subdued by Celestial Master Zhang.

According to another story, which was very popular during the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming Dynasties, Zhao was created by the Heavenly Emperor to guard the furnace in which pills and elixirs were concocted for Celestial Master Zhang in the Dragon-and-Tiger Mountains. Later on, people believed that Zhao was from the State of Qin (present-day Shaanxi), and had converted to Taoism in the Zhongnan Mountains. To award him for his excellent service in guarding the furnace, he was bestowed the title Zhengyi Xuantan Marshal, enabling him to command wind and rain, thunder and lightning, to save people from pestilence and natural disasters, and to help people get rich through engaging in commerce.

In the classic novel *Creation of the Gods*, Zhao Gongming was a deity living in the Emei Mountains. He helped a despotic emperor named Zhou by attacking Emperor Wenwang, but was finally killed for all his trouble. After his death, he was demoted to a god who was in charge of deities of Treasure Collector, Keeper of Valuables, Money Collector and Market Guardian. Therefore because of this status, he was natually the First God of Wealth. Next to him in the pantheon were Wu Xian, known as the Second God of Wealth; Cai Bo known as the Scholarly God of Wealth and Guan Yu, Militant God of Wealth. Legend had it that the Second God of Wealth, who had five brothers, had formerly been a great bandit who robbed the rich to relieve the poor. After he was killed, his spirit often came back to aid the poor financially. So he was regarded a gallant deity with a kind heart.

During the New Year, sacrifices should be offered to many gods, such as the Door God, God of Wells, God of Earth, God of Heaven and so on. Each area and each guild also has its own patron deity. To offer sacrifices to all those gods, people employed a wooden tablet written with the words: "To a myriad of gods, both in Heaven and on Earth". In this way, it is thought that no god would be neglected. Of course, people in different walks of life would not forget to pay homage specifically to those divinities in their respective lines of work. For instance, in some coastal areas, fishermen would offer sacrifices to the God of the Sea. Local people called it "Annual Gratitude Ceremony". They burned incense, offered pig heads, kid sheep and other dishes. After the ceremony, sacrificial food offerings would be moved to Tianhou Temple and Sanguan Temple.

In the region south of the Yangtse River, tea is an important local product. So every year, tea farmers pick the first batch of tea leaves to offer to the gods for good weather and adequate timely rain, which ensure a good harvest. In the areas where silkworms are raised, people offer sacrifices praying for a good harvest of silk on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month.

In yet other areas, women hold ceremonies to greet Goddess Zigu, in real life named He Liniang, on the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. This is because she was unable to stand feudal ethics, and committed suicide in a lavatory on that day. Later on people regarded her as the Goddess of the Lavatory. Believing that she is able to protect them from being bullied, women in particular hold her in high esteem. Some even regard her as a patron saint.

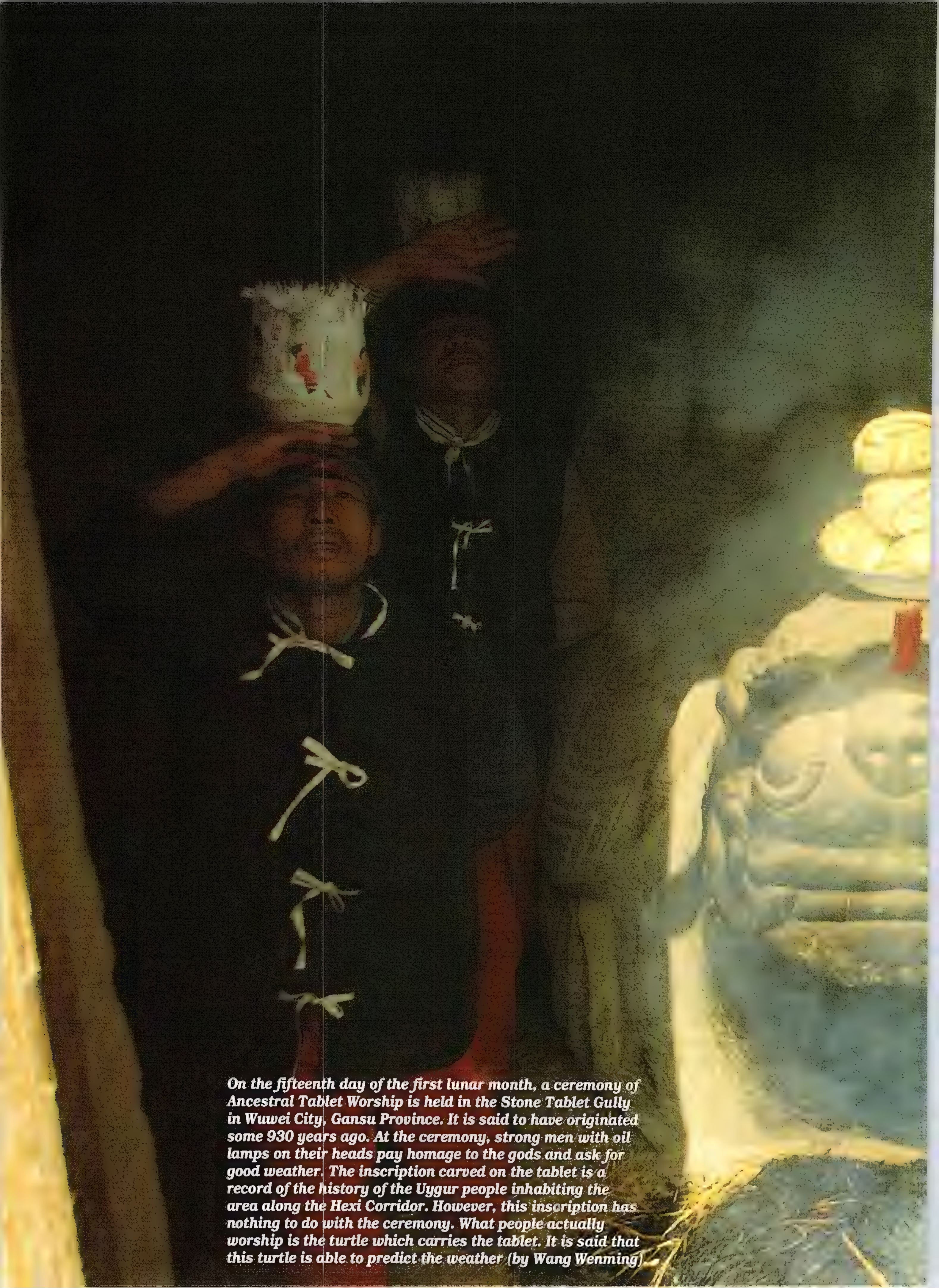
The custom of greeting Goddess Zigu is widely practised throughout China, but the methods employed vary. In Hunan and Hubei, women consult Zigu for the next year's silkworm farming. The greeting ceremony in Hebei is referred to as "Inviting the Goddess of the Lavatory"; in southern Fujian it is called "Offering Sacrifices to the Goddess"; in Suzhou, "Ushering in the Goddess"; and in Yunnan and Hunan, "Inviting the Girl the Seventh".

The usual practice of "Greeting the Goddess" is held with a spread of food beside a lavatory or a pigsty. To usher her in, women gather and call "Zigu, Zigu...." In southern Fujian, girls from five to sixteen years old would be required to participate in the activity on the fifteenth day of the first month. Each girl should bring with her a mini-shoe made by herself. The shoe would then be burnt beside a lavatory and its ash wrapped up with some vegetable leaves and then thrown into the lavatory pits. In Shandong, women use kitchen utensils to make dolls. They paint their faces, put dresses and pin flowers on the utensils. In the evening, they take the dolls to where the ceremony is held. While burning some paper money to invite Zigu, they consult the goddess, asking about their future marriage, silkworm farming and so on.

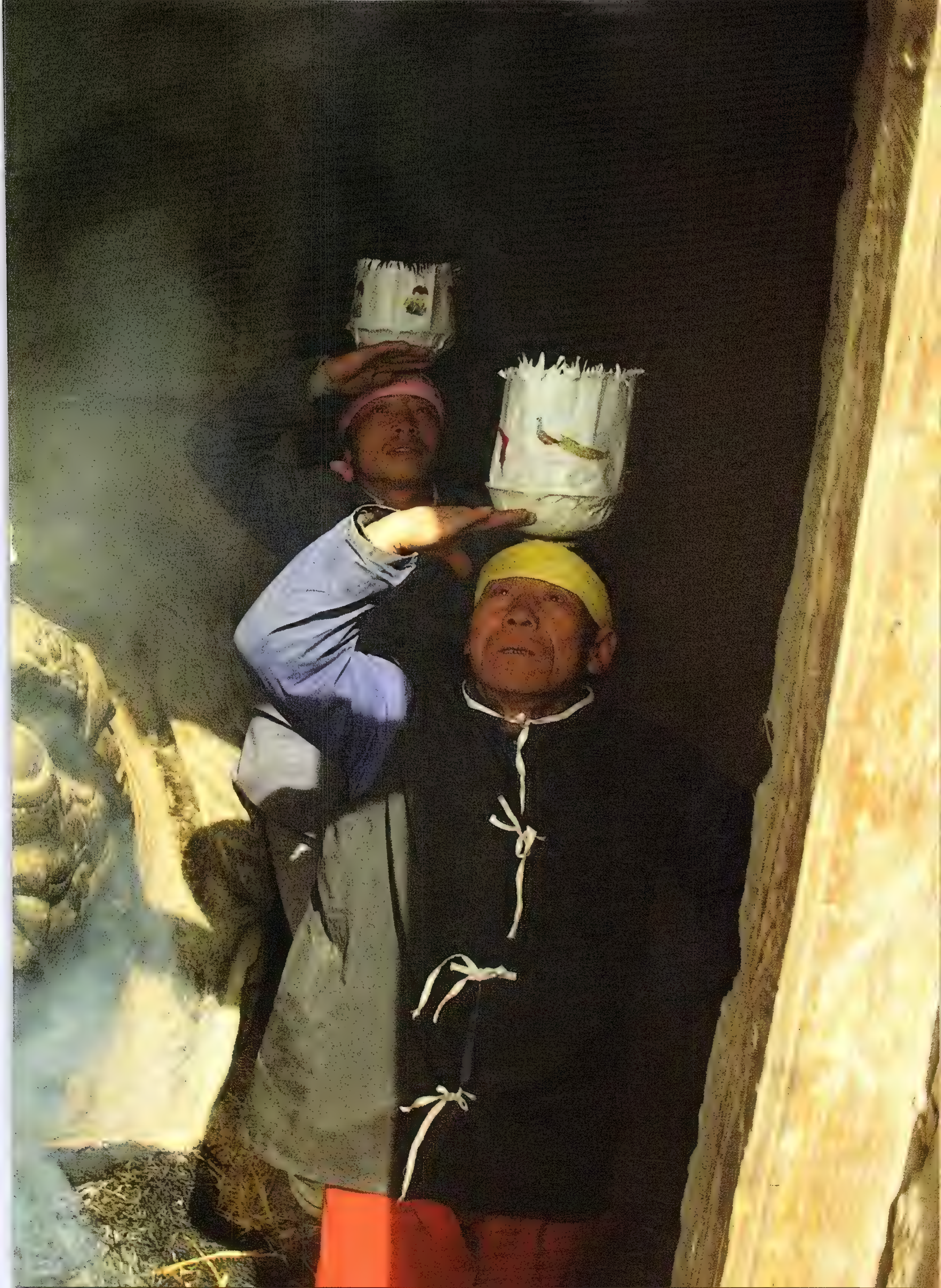
Today, such practices are in gradual decline. However, images of those gods still appear in celebrations such as in village operas, folk dances, and dancing on stilts. Instead of paying homage to the gods, they merely entertain themselves by dressing up like gods and goddesses. Anyway, it is a scene reflecting the present relationship between the gods and the people.

Translated by Wang Mingjie

On the eighth day of the first lunar month in the eastern suburbs of Zhangzhou in Fujian Province people piously offer sacrifices to gods for good weather (by Gao Yi).

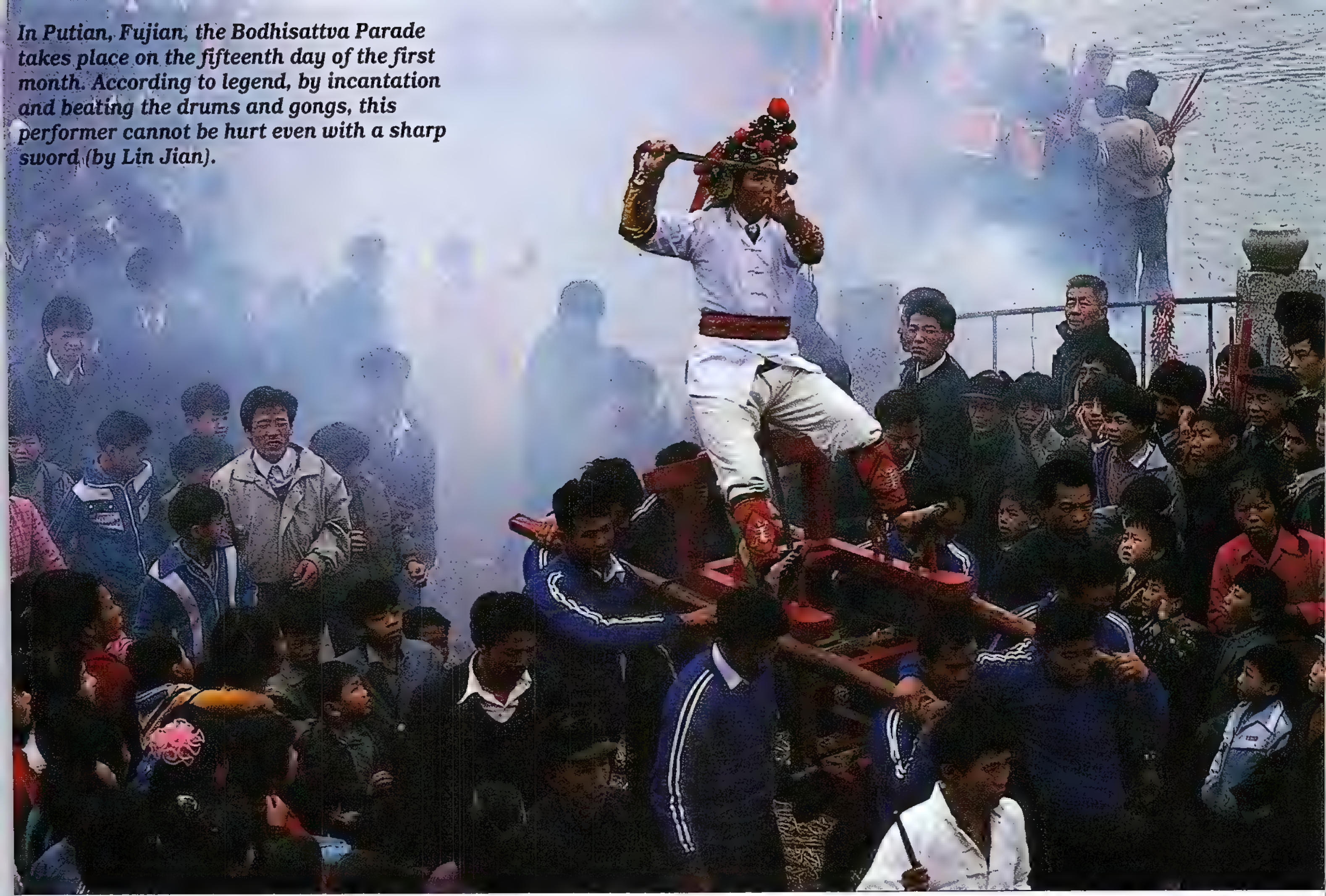


On the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, a ceremony of Ancestral Tablet Worship is held in the Stone Tablet Gully in Wuwei City, Gansu Province. It is said to have originated some 930 years ago. At the ceremony, strong men with oil lamps on their heads pay homage to the gods and ask for good weather. The inscription carved on the tablet is a record of the history of the Uygur people inhabiting the area along the Hexi Corridor. However, this inscription has nothing to do with the ceremony. What people actually worship is the turtle which carries the tablet. It is said that this turtle is able to predict the weather (by Wang Wenming).

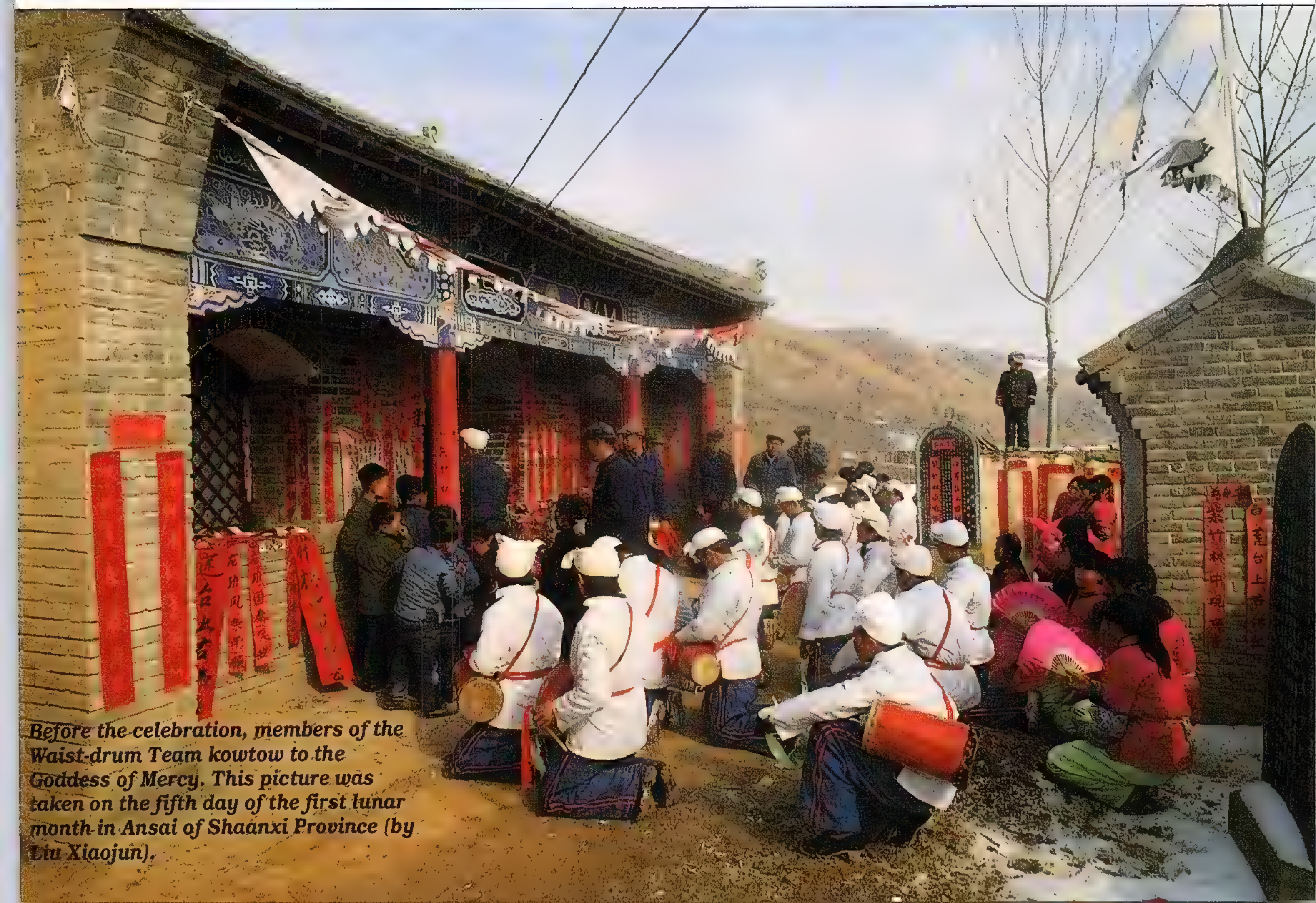


On the occasion of the New Year in the rural areas of northern Shuanxi, local people would, as a symbol, hold a small-scale temple fair, which would include activities such as story-telling, local operas and so on. Elderly people gather together to express their gratitude to the gods and pedlars also come to hawk their wares (by Zhao Dapeng).

The performance of Cart Drums is carried out o the fifteenth day of the first lunar month at the Ancestral Hall of Huangshi Town in Putian, Fuj Province (by Lin Jian).



In Putian, Fujian, the Bodhisattva Parade takes place on the fifteenth day of the first month. According to legend, by incantation and beating the drums and gongs, this performer cannot be hurt even with a sharp sword (by Lin Jian).



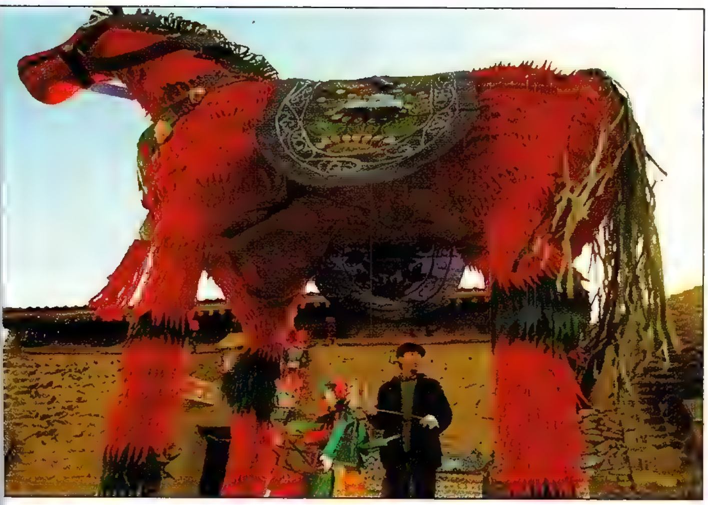
Before the celebration, members of the Waist-drum Team kowtow to the Goddess of Mercy. This picture was taken on the fifth day of the first lunar month in Ansai of Shaanxi Province (by Liu Xiaojun).

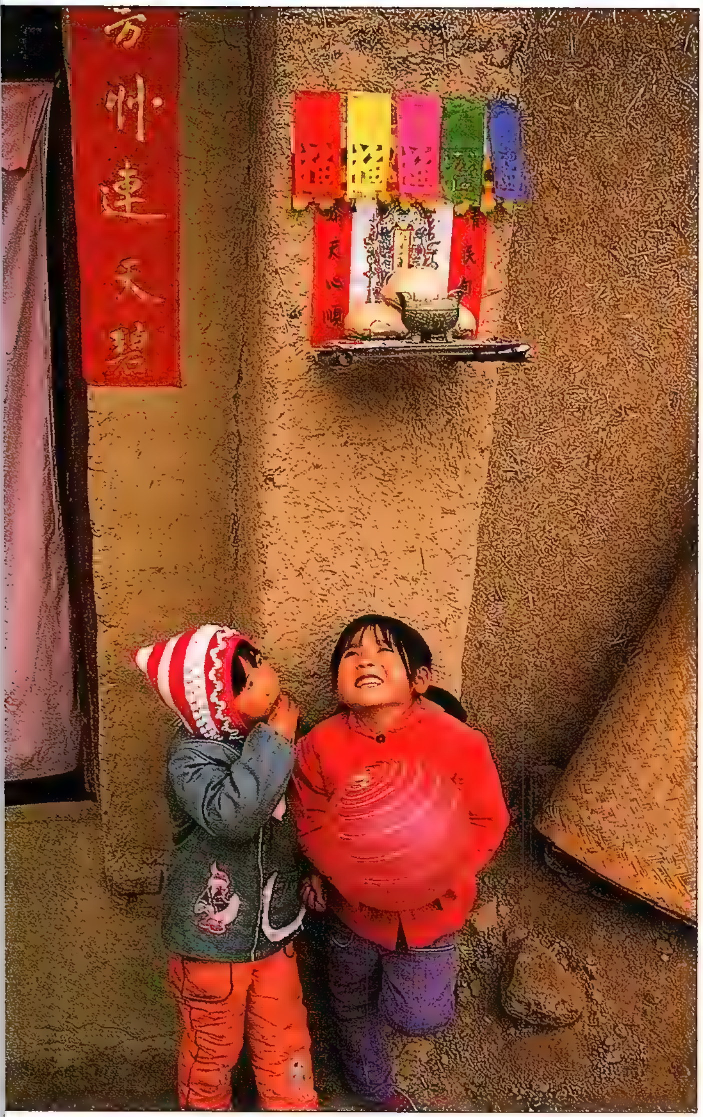
The Baiyun (White Cloud) Monastery in Jiaxian County is the largest Taoist monastery in northern Shaanxi. In the first month of every year, various activities such as the Taoist rites and local operas take place here (by Liu Xiaojun).

The Lantern Festival is regarded as the most significant festival in the eyes of these Hakka people dwelling in western Fujian. On the fourteenth day of the first month, villagers gather at the entrance to the village to hold a sacrificial ceremony (by Lin Xiaoyu).

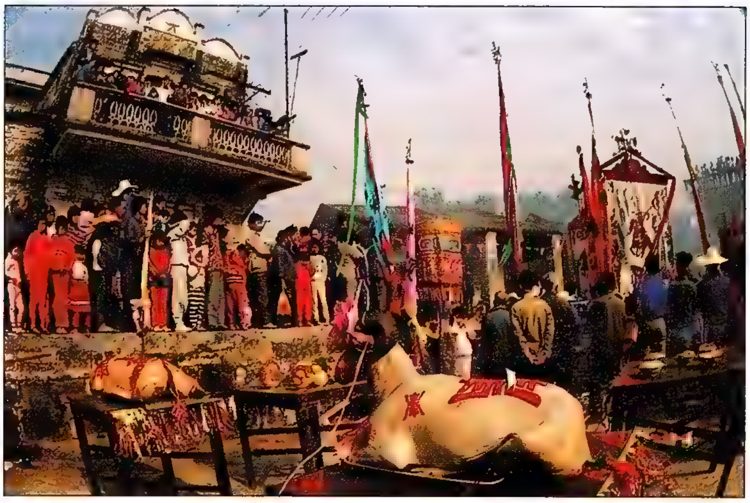
The New Year celebration and sacrificial ceremony are annually held at Chihu in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province (by Huang Xuan).

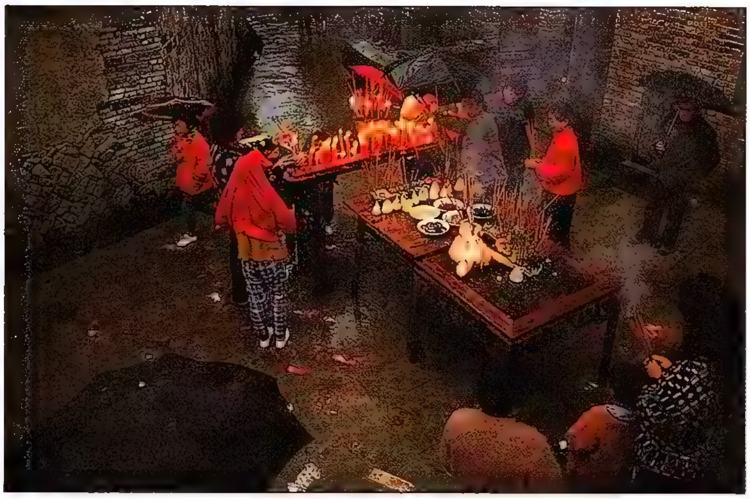
In the eastern part of Gansu, people offer sacrifices during the New Year to their forefathers at tombs. On such occasions, the offerings often include paper oxen, horses, sheep and so on, for the reason that the dead can also enjoy the happiness. So shops selling such paper-made objects have appeared in the streets (by Sun Jianzhong).





The Lantern Festival at Shuikou Town in Kaiping, Guangdong Province has a long history. The sheep, pigs and chickens offered at the sacrificial ceremony symbolize the "prosperity of domestic animals and harvest of five grains" according to an old saying (by Feng Yaohua).





The Chen Family Ancestral Hall used to be located on this lane in Chengguan Town, Taishun County, Zhejiang Province. Today, on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the Chen's clan members gather here to offer sacrifices to their ancestors (by Xie Guanghui).

Like the people in central China, the people of Chenjia Town in Fengxiang County, Shaanxi Province begin the ceremony of worshipping gods at the end of the twelfth month. Those who have a courtyard of their own set up an altar in the centre. Incense and candles are lit, and food is placed in front of the altar. Those without courtyards set up an altar on high walls outside the door (by Shi Baoxiu).

Ethnic New Year Celebrations

China is a country with a veritable multitude of nationalities. Like the Hans, many ethnic peoples also celebrate their New Year at about the same time. Due to the differences in calendars, the dates of the New Year's Day are slightly different. However, on the first day of the first lunar month, celebrations are held by the Mongols, Yaos, Manchus, Huis, Tibetans, Gelaos, Zhuangs, Daurs, Oroqens, Jingpos, Bouyeis, Tujias, Lis, Gaoshans, Dongxiangs, Yugurs, Jings and Naxis. New Year's Day for other nationalities may be one day earlier or later. Some nationalities' New Year's Days are set on completely different dates, however, they also hold celebrations on the first day of the first lunar month. So we can say that the Lunar New Year is a festival for the whole country. Though the New Year's Day falls on about the same time, each nationality has its own way of celebrating the start of the New Year.

Two New Year Celebrations Within One Year

The Zhuang people inhabiting Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan and Guangdong have two New Year celebrations. On the thirtieth day of the first lunar month, people living along the border between China and Vietnam would have another New Year celebration as grand as the first New Year. The singing competition lasts for three days and nights. It is said that during the anti-French war in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), people missed the New Year celebration because of the war. But soon on the thirtieth day of that same month, the French were defeated. To make up for the New Year's festivities thus missed people held grand celebrations just as they normally would for the New Year. Ever since then, there have been two New Year carnivals for the Zhuang people.

The Mongol's White Moon

The New Year's Day of the Mongols also falls on the first day of the first lunar month. It is locally referred to as *Baiyue* (White Moon).

The New Year of the Mongols is divided into two parts: "Farewell to the Old Year" and "Greeting the New Year". The celebration of the "Farewell to the Old Year" takes place on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month. In the evening, there is the ceremony of offering sacrifices to flames, the action of which symbolizes the prosperity of the clan. First, the elders light nine bonfires and then throw sacrifices, mostly of food, into the leaping flames, wishing everybody well.

On New Year's Eve, all members of a family sit together in the centre of a yurt around a spread of delicious food. The younger ones propose toasts to the elderly, which is called the "toast to the old year". Then they play chess with pieces made of sheep bone, while waiting for the arrival of the New Year.

Starting on the very first day of the New Year, people set out to visit relatives and friends on the grasslands. On the way, young riders often engage in horse races. In each family that they visit, usually it is the son-in-law of the host who makes toasts to them. While drinking, he would also dance and sing himself.

To Sun the Huge Picture of the Buddha in Tibet

The Tibetan calendar is similar to that of the Han, and Tibetans celebrate their New Year around the same time of the Han Chinese New Year.

During the New Year's holidays, many activities are carried out, such as horse races, archery and various dances. It is also a great event for monasteries. Grand ceremonies are held; monks with masks execute the Buddha Dance to expel evil spirits so as to usher in the New Year. Such ceremonies are held on a rotating system by one monastery after another. The climax of all the celebrations is to sun the picture of the Great Buddha, which is carried out by the largest monastery. Almost a hundred monks carry the huge roll of the painting to a mountain and spread it over the slope for people to worship.

The Dong's Group Greetings

On the New Year, the Dong people hold the grand activity of what they call Group Greetings, which is similar to the Han people's New Year Greetings. They visit one village after another in groups. What is unique about this is that they have formed themselves into performance groups such as a *lusheng* pipes group, or a song-and-dance group. The host village has a group of women waiting at the entrance. When visitors arrive, they ask questions in the form of a song. The visitors have to answer questions by singing, too.

During the New Year, a bullfight is organized on the Fair-play Day. The winner is given colourful ribbons as decorations and awarded a title.

The Pumi's "Insects-Eating"

The Pumi people, inhabiting northeastern Yunnan, just west of Sichuan, mark their New Year during the twelfth lunar month. The exact date of the New Year's Day varies from place to place. The celebrations can last anywhere from three days up to a fortnight.

During the New Year, various activities take place including singing and dancing, swinging, horse racing, wrestling and catching flying birds. On the last day of the New Year, young men and women go up to the mountains to hold what is known as an "insects-eating" ceremony. They put some pop corn and puffed rice in a big winnowing basket. Girls bury their bracelets in it. Then they all sit round the basket and begin to eat. Each piece symbolizes an insect. While eating, they talk, laugh and sing. When all the food is gone, they find and put on their own bracelets and then go home.

The Jinuos Beat Wooden Drums

The Jinuo people, inhabiting Xishuangbanna in southernmost Yunnan, follow a solar calendar. That means they have thirteen months in a year instead of twelve. The first few days in the first month are thei New Year. The exact dates for the New Year vary from village to village.

To celebrate the New Year, one important item is to beat a large wooden drum. In the eyes of the Jinuo people, the wooden drum is the most sacred object in life. So usually it is hung in the house of the village head. During the New Year, this drum is moved to an open ground. People, men and women, young and old with flowers on thei heads and held in their hands, dance around the drum.

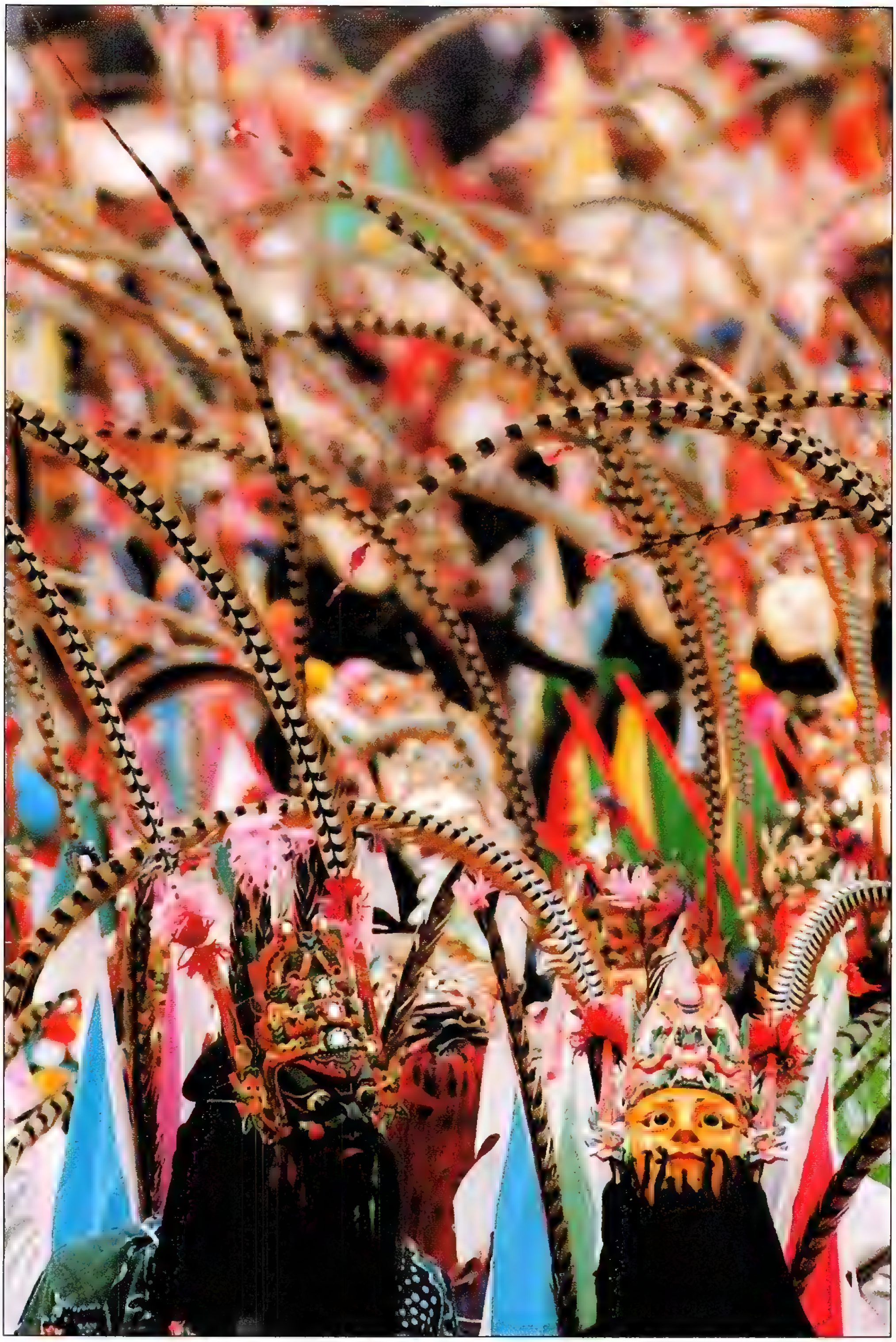
The Jinuo people like playing a game called "Turning Round the Bamboo Pole". It goes like this: A girl holds steady a bamboo pole by its upper end. A young man holds the pole at the bottom with his hands and lifts up his head to face the sky. Then he moves round and round the pole. The one who is able to make the greatest number o revolutions is the champion. This game has now become a means fo one to find his or her sweetheart.

Black Face of the Daur and Oroqen

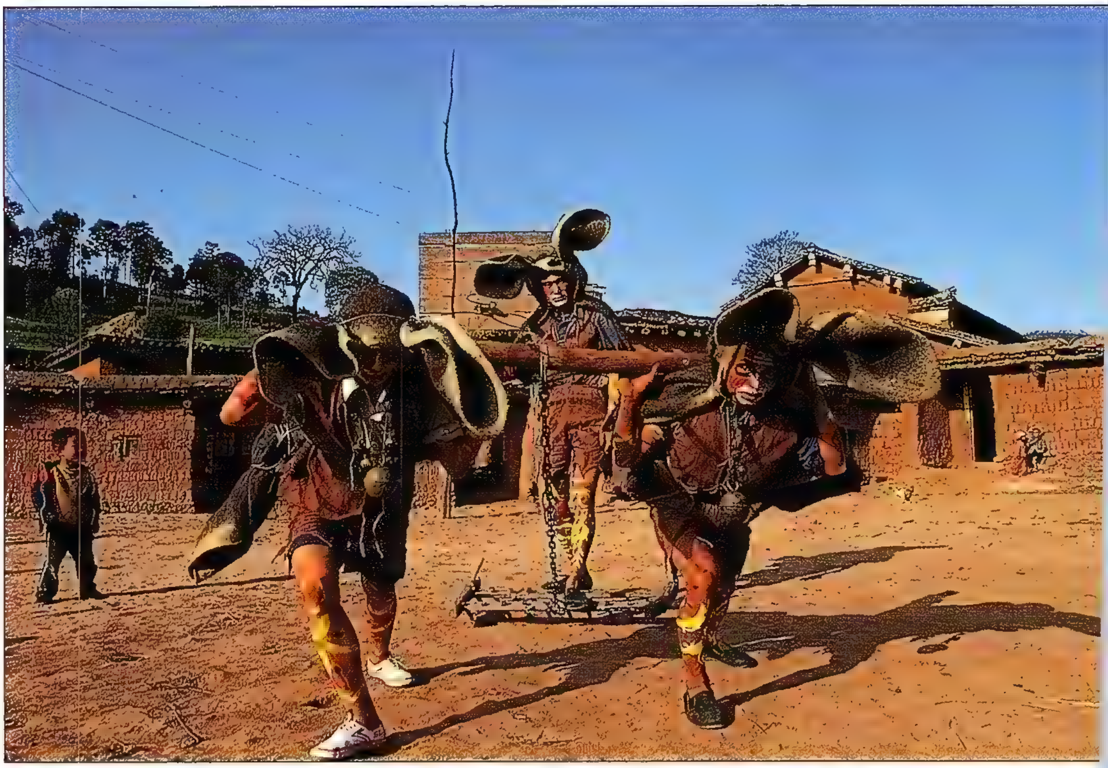
The Daur people are distributed over the banks of the Nenjiang Rive in Northeast China. Apart from the New Year's celebrations, specia festivities are also held on the sixteenth day of that same month. On interesting and unique game is to blacken each other's faces. Early i the morning, youngsters rub their hands against the side of cauldrons and then rub their soiled hands against others' faces. They believe tha this will bring one good luck and health.

On the eve of the New Year, the Oroqen people, living also i Northeast China, walk several times around a horse pen with a birch bark box in their hands, while keeping calling the horse, crying "Mmha Mmha...." On the second and third day, a horse race is held. On th sixteenth day, they also blacken one another's faces just like the Dau people. However, in a family, the sons (and their wives too) and th father are not allowed to take part in this activity, nor is it permitted t take place between the elder brothers and their younger sisters-in-law. young man can blacken an elder's face, but he must first kowtow to hi before taking action.

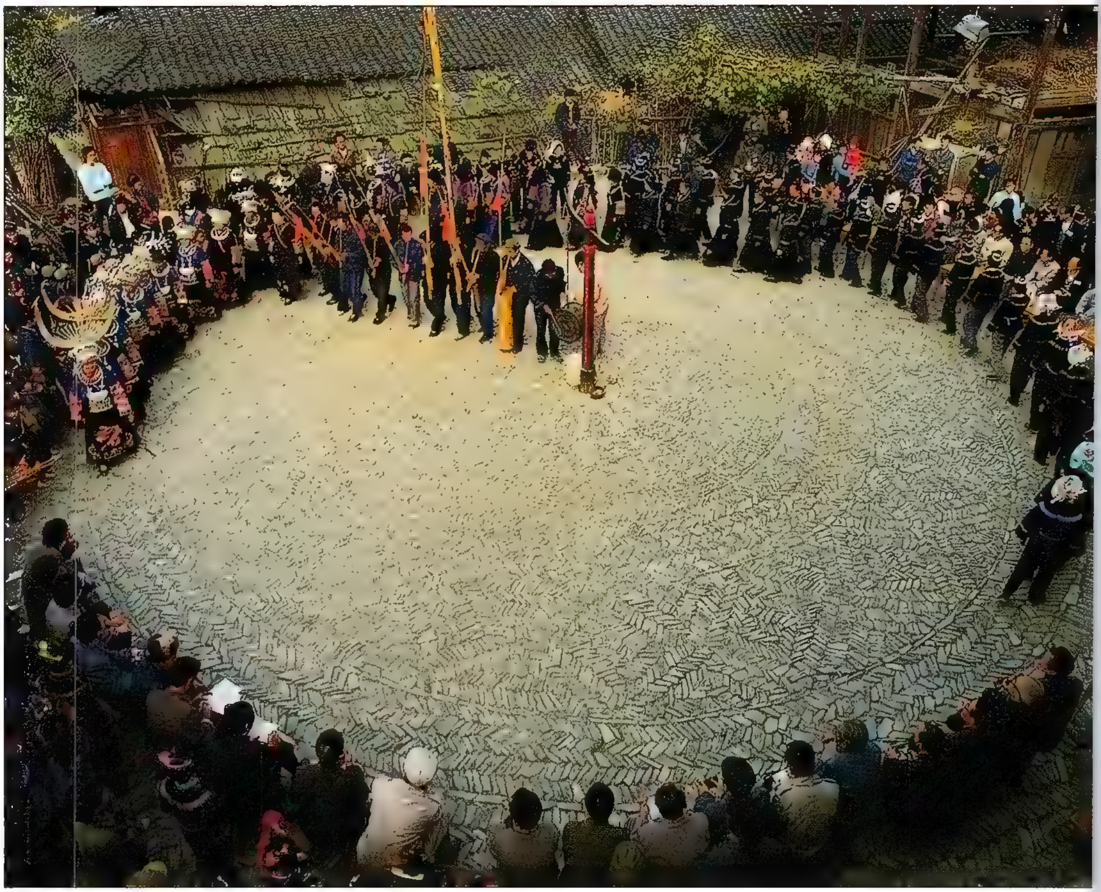
Translated by Wang Mingji



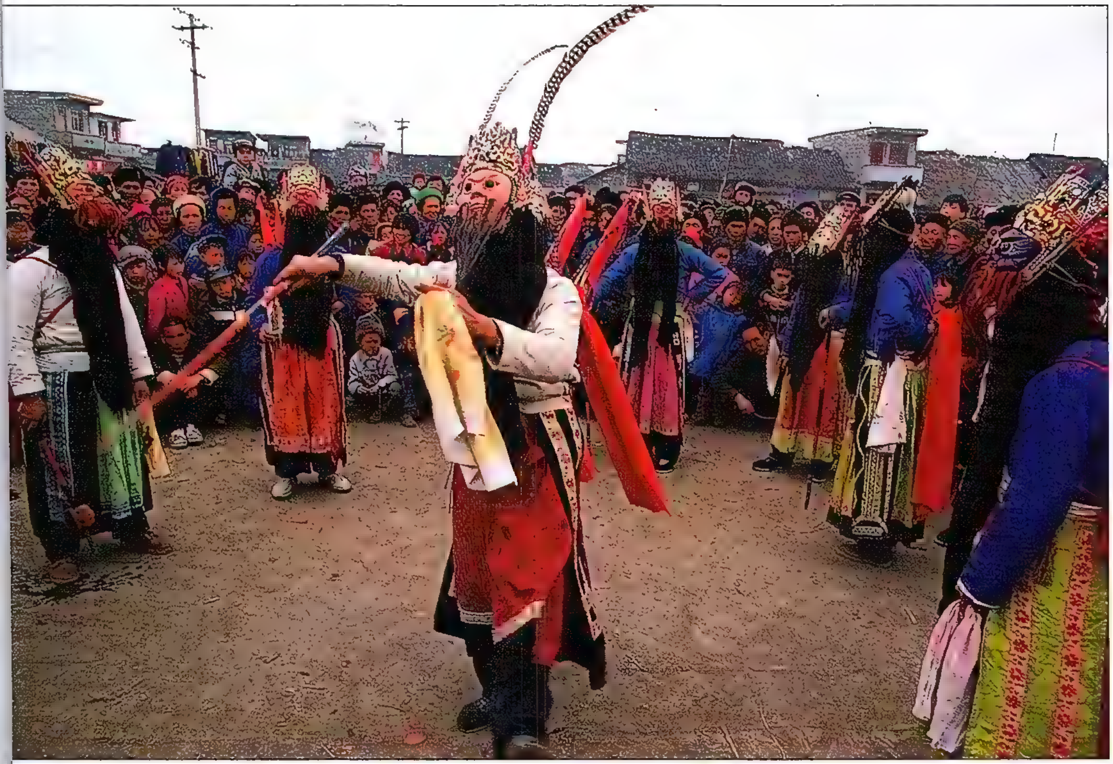
In central Guizhou, the Bouyei people like to put on a variety of masks while performing the local Dixi *opera during the New Year (by Luo Shibao).*



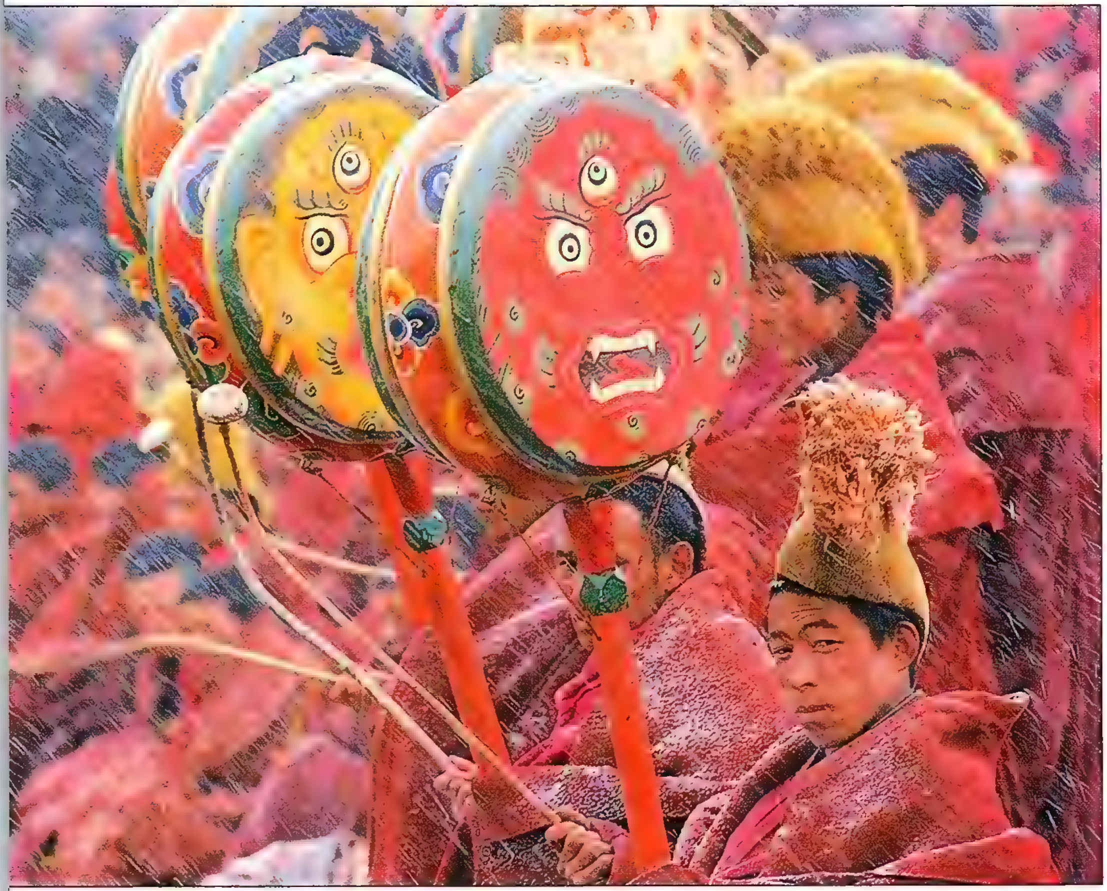
The Luoluo *people in the area of the Ailao Mountains in Yunnan hold a sacrificial ceremony called the "Tiger Festival" from the eighth to the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. It is said that tigers were their ancestors. The hero of the festival is of course the tiger, actually a person in costume which, after dancing on an open ground, rides a Mountain God float to call on each household to offer blessings (by Li Zhixiong).*



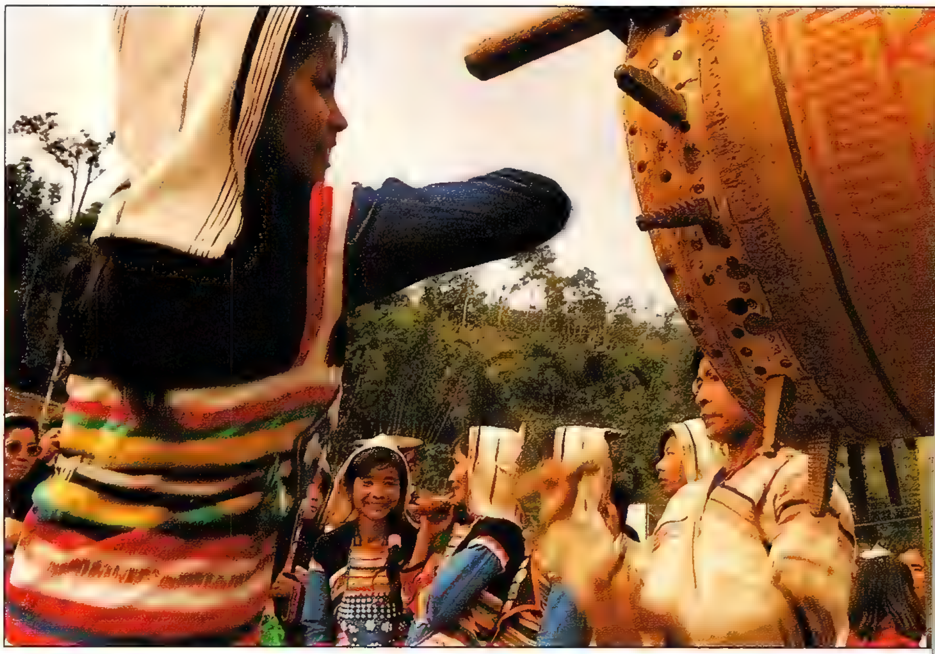
The Miao people in Langde Village of Leishan County in Guizhou Province perform the Treading on the Bronze Drum ritual for visitors on the tenth day of the first lunar month (by He Huaibo).



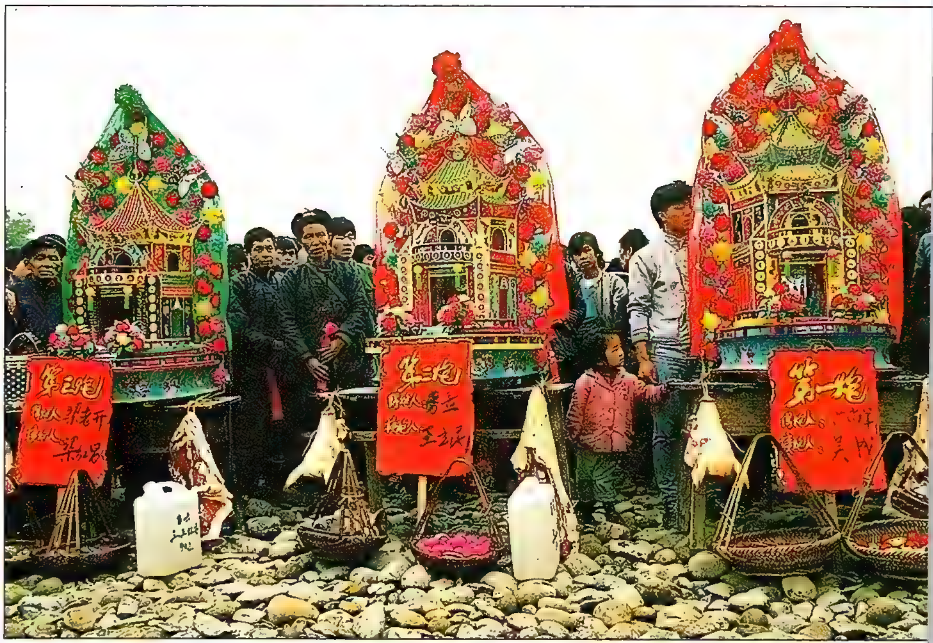
On the New Year, the Dixi, a country opera in Guizhou, is most popular. On the seventh day of the first lunar month, which happens to be a day of the local country fair, at Machang of Pingba County in Guizhou, a Dixi opera troupe has come to give performances. Its performers all wear masks. One thing unique about it is that they do not need a stage for a performance. The audience sit on the ground and are more intimate with the performers (by Li Shixiong).



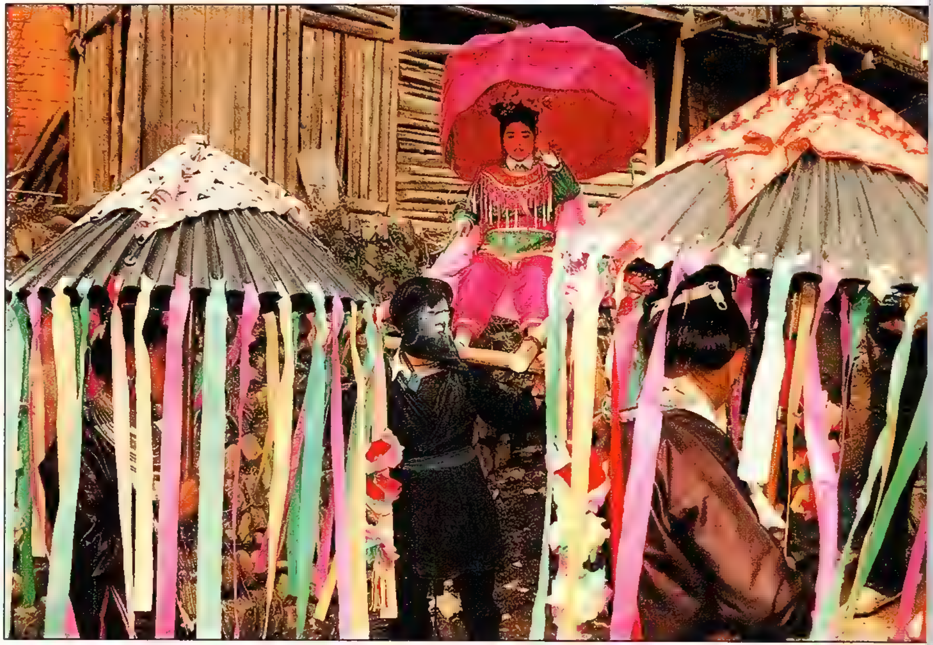
Defying wind and snow, the pious monks and laity gather at the Gerdi Monastery in Aba County of Sichuan to hold the Grand Rites on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month (by Yang Wenjian).



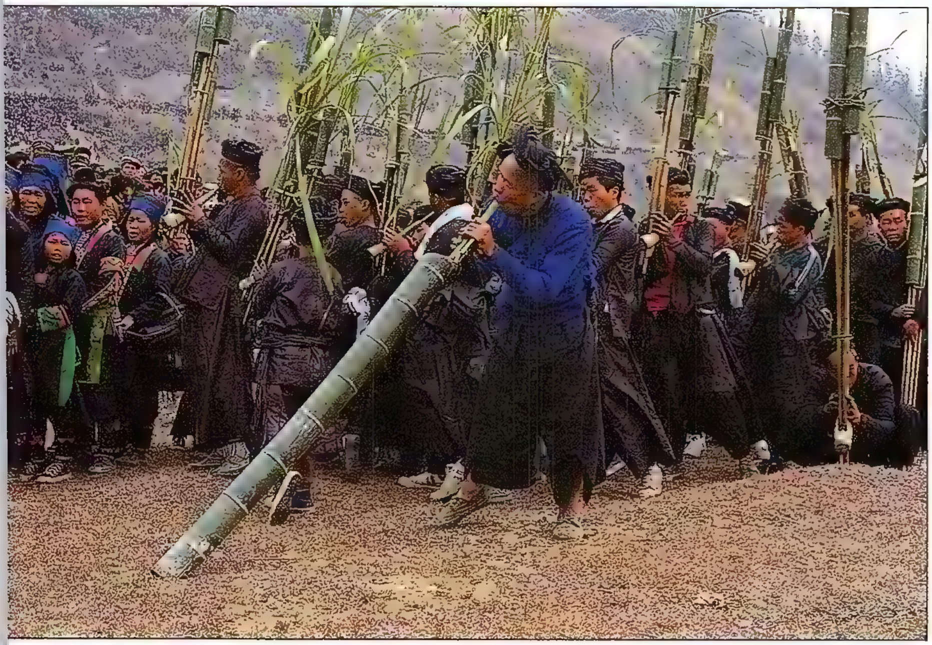
The Jinuo people in the Jinuo Mountains in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan celebrate their New Year by beating drums from the second day to the fifth day of the first lunar month (by Shao Yu).



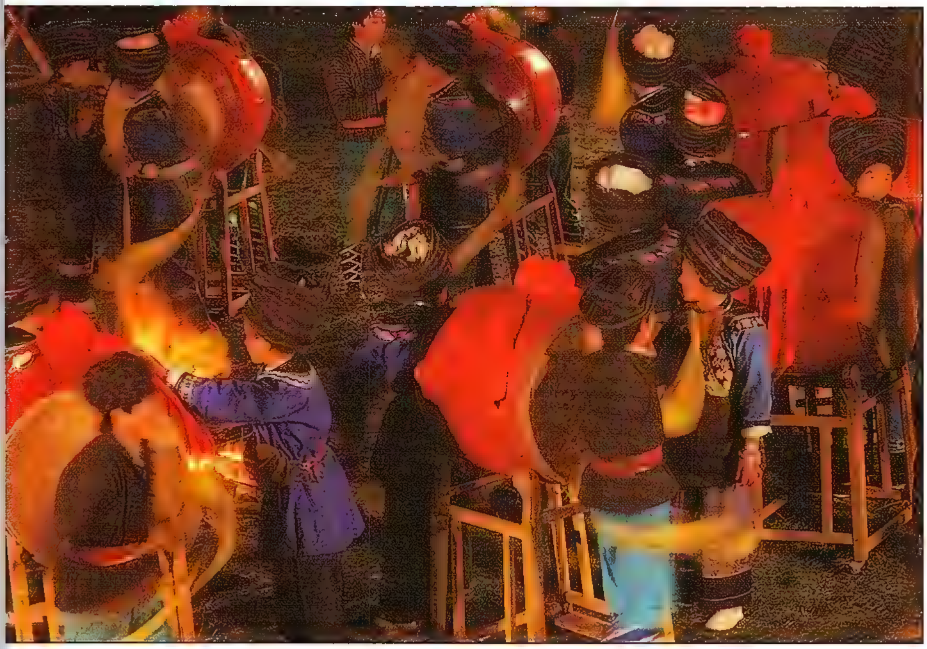
On the seventh day of the first lunar month, the Dong people in Chengyang Township of Sanjiang County, Guangxi play a game called Seizing Floral Rods. The rods, made of rattan or iron, are sent airborne by home-made rockets. When they fall, people organized in groups vie with one another to seize them. Those who succeed in obtaining one of the rods are to enjoy good luck during the coming year. These are the trophies for the winners (by Yang Changyuan).



On the ninth day of the first lunar month, an activity held every two years called "Carrying Gentry in Sedan-chairs" is carried out by the Dong people in Sanjiang County, Guangxi. The carriers are performed by people made up to look ugly, symbolic of their primitive ancestors. Gentlemen and ladies sitting in sedan-chairs represent their posterity, that is, the people of today. All this indicates that life is getting better and better (by Liu Yongtai).



The lusheng *pipes competition is held annually from the ninth day to the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in Rongjiang County of Guizhou Province. More than 60 teams from local villages of the Miao and Dong nationalities participate in activities like bull-fighting, the* lusheng *pipes dance, the* lusheng *pipes competition, antiphonal singing, horse-racing and some other traditional games (above by Xiao Huinan, below by He Huaibo).*



The farmers in western Hunan light bonfires on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month to eradicate evil spirits and celebrate the New Year. On that night, rosin oil torches are lit at the entrance to a village and at the ends of the streets. Several bonfires are lit. People of the Miao, Tujia and Han nationalities dance around them while performing the Lion Dance, Miao Drum Beating and other choreographic rituals (by Wu Tinghong).

Night Bright as Day

The Lantern Festival brings the Spring Festival to a close with a blaze of luminous glory. Starting from the twelfth or thirteenth day, colourful lanterns and their celebrations appear throughout the country and on the night of the fifteenth, the gay festival reaches its climax – a kaleidoscope of glaring lights.

The custom of lighting up lanterns at the Lantern Festival came into being as early as the Han Dynasty over 2,000 years ago. It is said that in order to celebrate his coronation the Han Emperor Wendi (reign dates 179-157 B.C.) chose the fifteenth day of the first month as the Lantern Festival as it was the day when Zhou Bo paved the way for his enthronement by crushing the Rebellion of the Lüs. That very night Emperor Wendi walked out of the palace and joined the people in their happy jubilation. But at the time when the dynasty started no lanterns were lit. Historical records suggest that lanterns may have been lit starting from the reign of Emperor Wudi (reign dates 140-87 B.C.) of the Western Han Dynasty. When the emperor was once seriously ill, a necromancer helped him communicate with the supreme ruler in Heaven. The emperor fully recovered without taking any medication. As a result, an altar was built to offer sacrifices to the god. Every year, apart from several thanksgiving sacrifices, a ceremony commemorating this alleged miracle was held on the fifteenth day of the first month with lanterns ignited until dawn in the palace. Later, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, Emperor Mingdi (reign dates 58-75) advocated Buddhism and issued orders to light up lanterns on the fifteenth day and went in person to kindle lanterns and worship the Buddha in monasteries; thus an event resembling the Lantern Festival was brought to the common people from the imperial palace.

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the festival became a lantern celebration (called the Lantern Fair) on an unprecedented scale. In Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), then the capital, and perhaps the most populous city in the world with a population of one million, the Lantern Festival became a grand spectacle during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. By the time of the middle of the Tang Dynasty, there were as many as 50,000 lanterns lit, some of which were over 26 metres high. Emperor Xuanzong had a lantern tower 50 metres high built. At the lantern fairs during the Tang Dynasty, acrobatic performances also took place. The night of the festival was also a night of song and dance – a national jubilee. Besides, national competitions of all sorts of lanterns were held at the same time. The Lantern Festival also served as a part of the courtship process. Young men and women would venture forth and try to meet his or her match during the festival. Thus, today's Lantern Festival is also known as Chinese Valentine's Day.

By the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the Lantern Festival grew in scale and the lanterns themselves became ever more intricate. There were even "Lantern Riddles" on the lanterns for people to solve. At this time, Buddhism was a strong influence which was also manifest in the celebrations. At the centre of the Lantern Festival site, a few scaffolds would be set up and decorated with different figures, such as the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra riding on a white elephant, or Bodhisattva Manjusri riding on a monkey, all of which added to the excitement of the festival.

During the later dynasties, the Lantern Festival underwent further evolution and its duration increased correspondingly. Whereas in the Tang Dynasty, it lasted three days, in the Song Dynasty it extended to five days while in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) it stretched a full eleven days from the eighth to the eighteenth day of the first month.

The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) inherited all the festivals of the Han nationality, but no longer held a lantern fair in the palace. However, the folk lantern fairs were magnificent and their duration lasted five days, roughly the same length as the Lantern Festival in modern times.

With the heritage of fine workmanship of various generations over 2,000 years, the lanterns have become more and more variegated and fascinating and lanterns in every place of the country manifest their own special features, making use of every material available, including sheepskin, bamboo filaments, silk, satin, wheat stems and glass, and even oranges and watermelons made into lanterns in unusual shapes. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the merry-go-round lantern, going round and round and thus presenting a wonderful view. The images of various animals, plants, figures and landscapes, although in complicated shapes, can be turned into colourful lanterns, and sets of mythological stories and legends, celestial paradises or even earthly Shangrilas, can be portrayed by the lanterns.

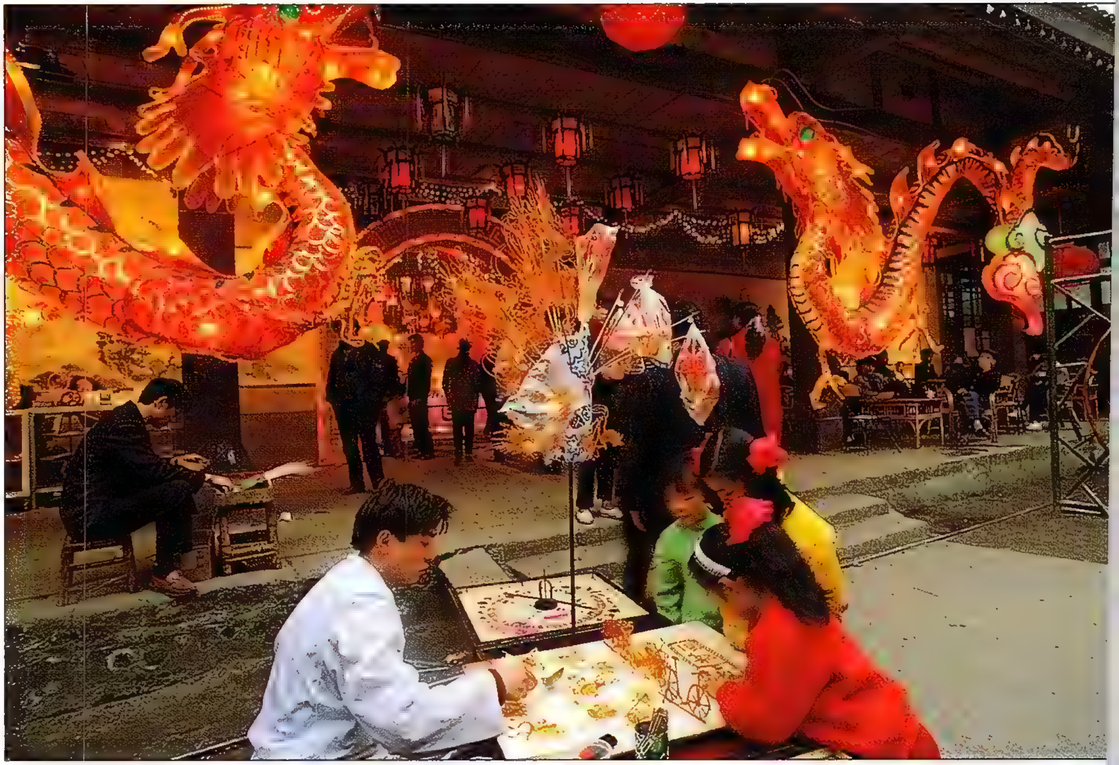
Of all the different kinds of lanterns, the dancing dragon lantern is the favourite of all. Its appearance on the night of the Lantern Festival is sufficient to draw people out of their houses. Known as the Fire Dragon, the dragon lantern has a frame made of bamboo filaments with a silk covering. A long dragon lantern is generally composed of dozens and even a hundred movable sections, each of which is held up and moved by a man. In the evening every section holds a lit candle inside and hence the whole lantern becomes a Divine Dragon. At some places the dragon lantern is accompanied by fireworks, presenting a magnificent view of a golden dragon amidst brilliant and colourful sparks.

In modern times, the Lantern Festival is still a great event. Incorporating local customs reflected in particular lantern forms and representations, every place has its own style of lanterns. As modern technology offers greater scope for creative efforts, this traditional Spring Festival art form will surely become even more colourful in the future.

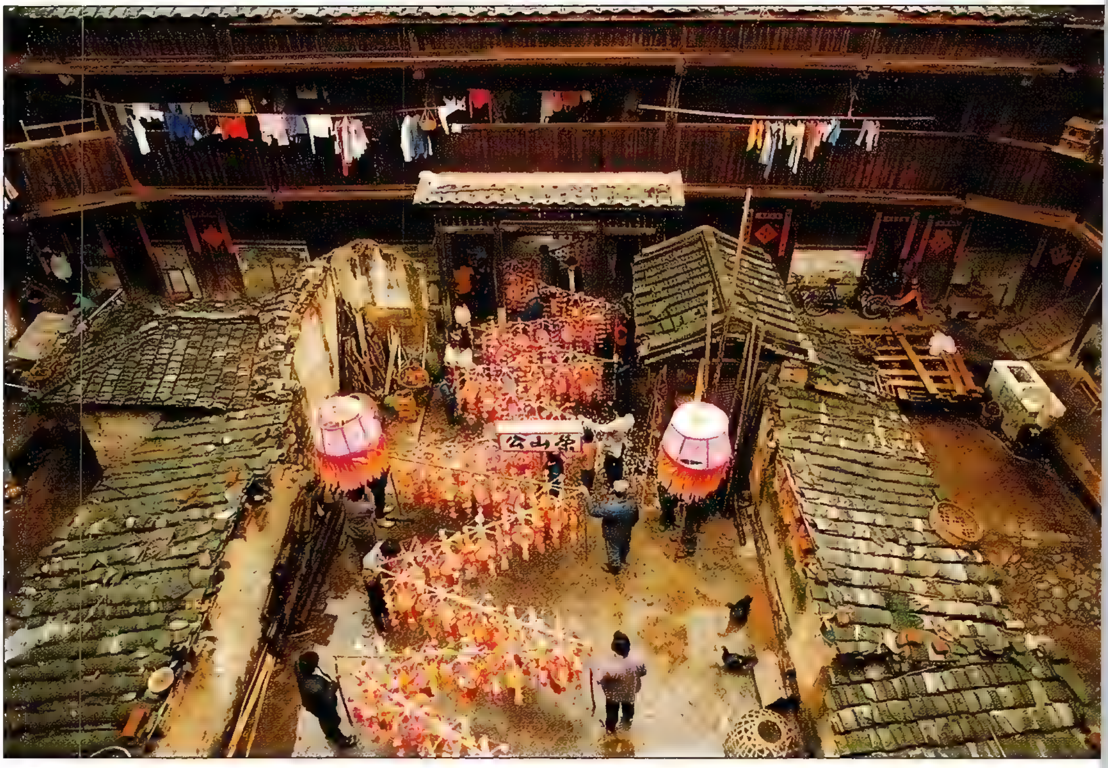
Translated by Gu Weizhou

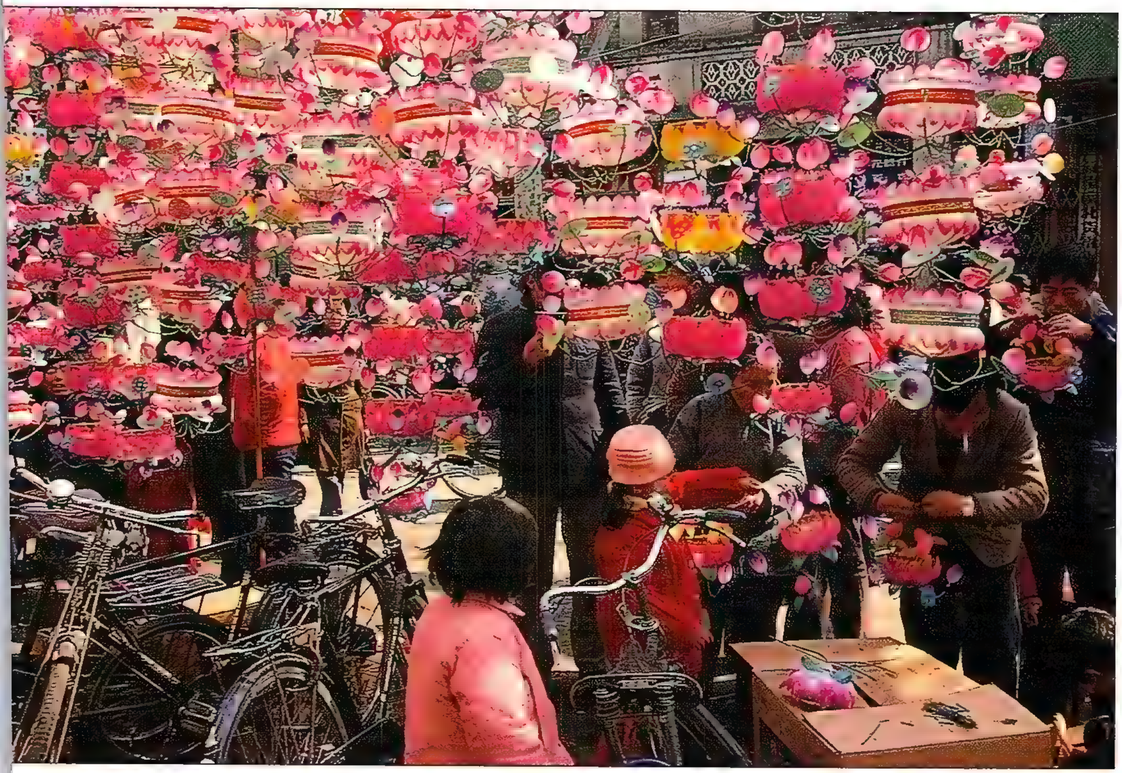
On the fifteenth day of the first month, in Shengfang Town, Hebei every family makes special lanterns for the festival and hangs them in the streets and lanes (by Feng Weilie).

At the Lantern Festival in Chengdu, Sichuan, the artist is showing the technique employed in sugar painting: first melting the sugar and then pouring the syrup on the marble slab to form the images of dragons, phoenixes, chickens, sheep, or even daily necessities and production tools (by Chen Jin).

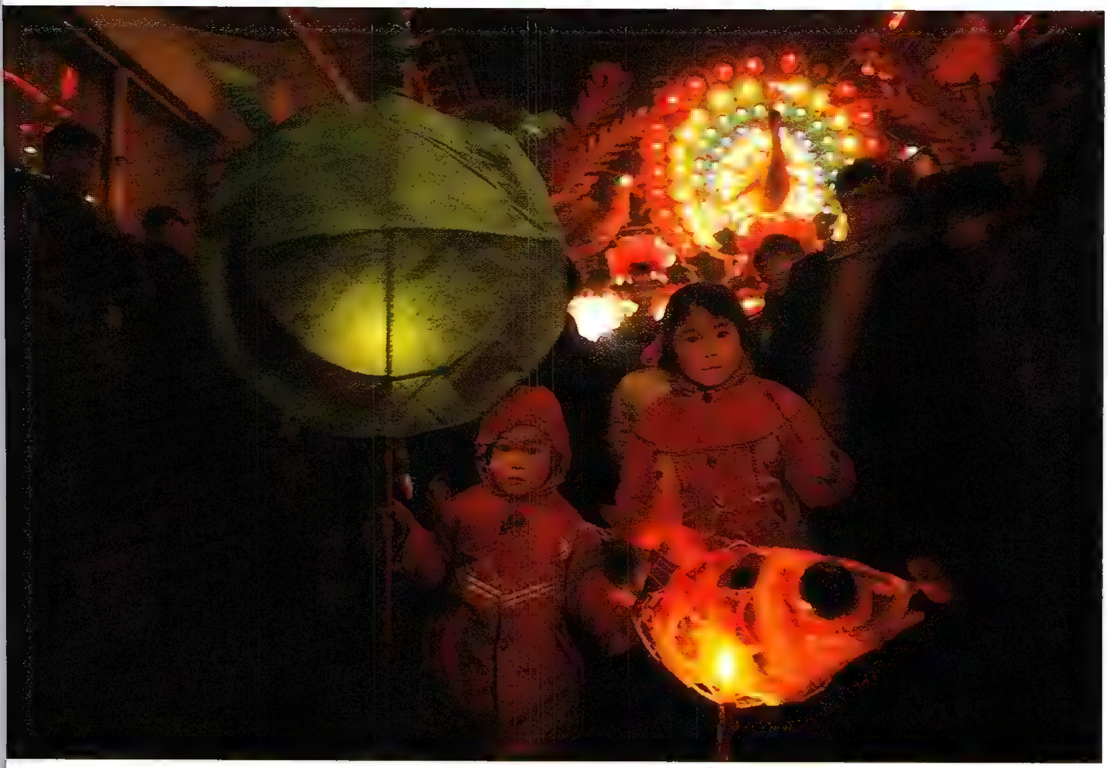


Xiayang Village at Yongding County in Fujian Province is one of the ancient settlements of the Hakka people who migrated here from the north of the country. They have still maintained many of their old traditions. The so-called "Earthen Building" is a round walled city where an entire clan of Hakka families lives together. The courtyard serves as the site of the Lantern Festival (by Lin Xiaoyu).

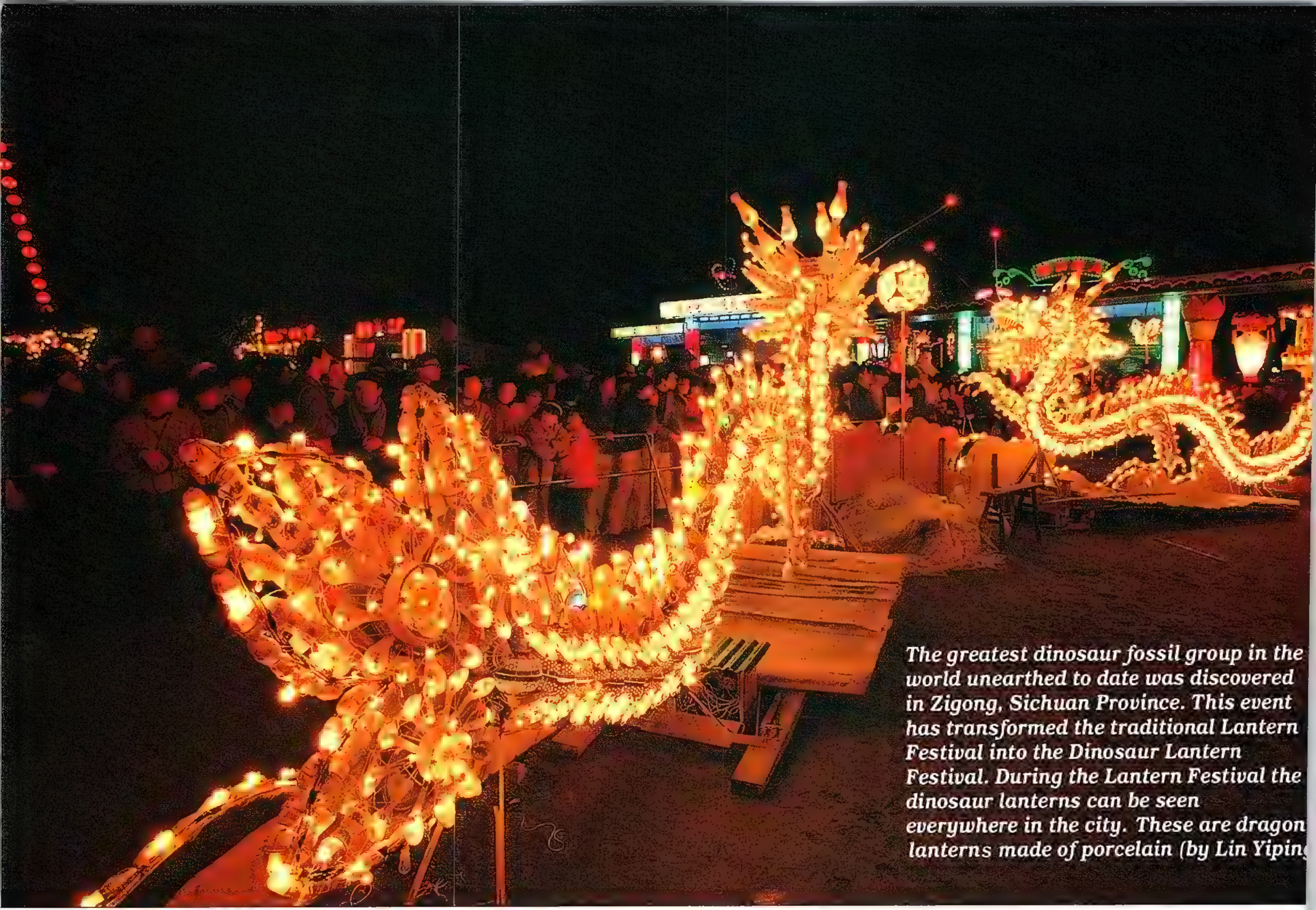




The Confucian Temple located on the north bank of the Qinhuai River in Nanjing, Jiangsu was once the site of a Confucian school, but is now under the sway of the lantern jubilation at the Lantern Festival. The vendors here are busy selling coloured lanterns in the shape of lotus flowers, rabbits and toads (by Guo Qun).

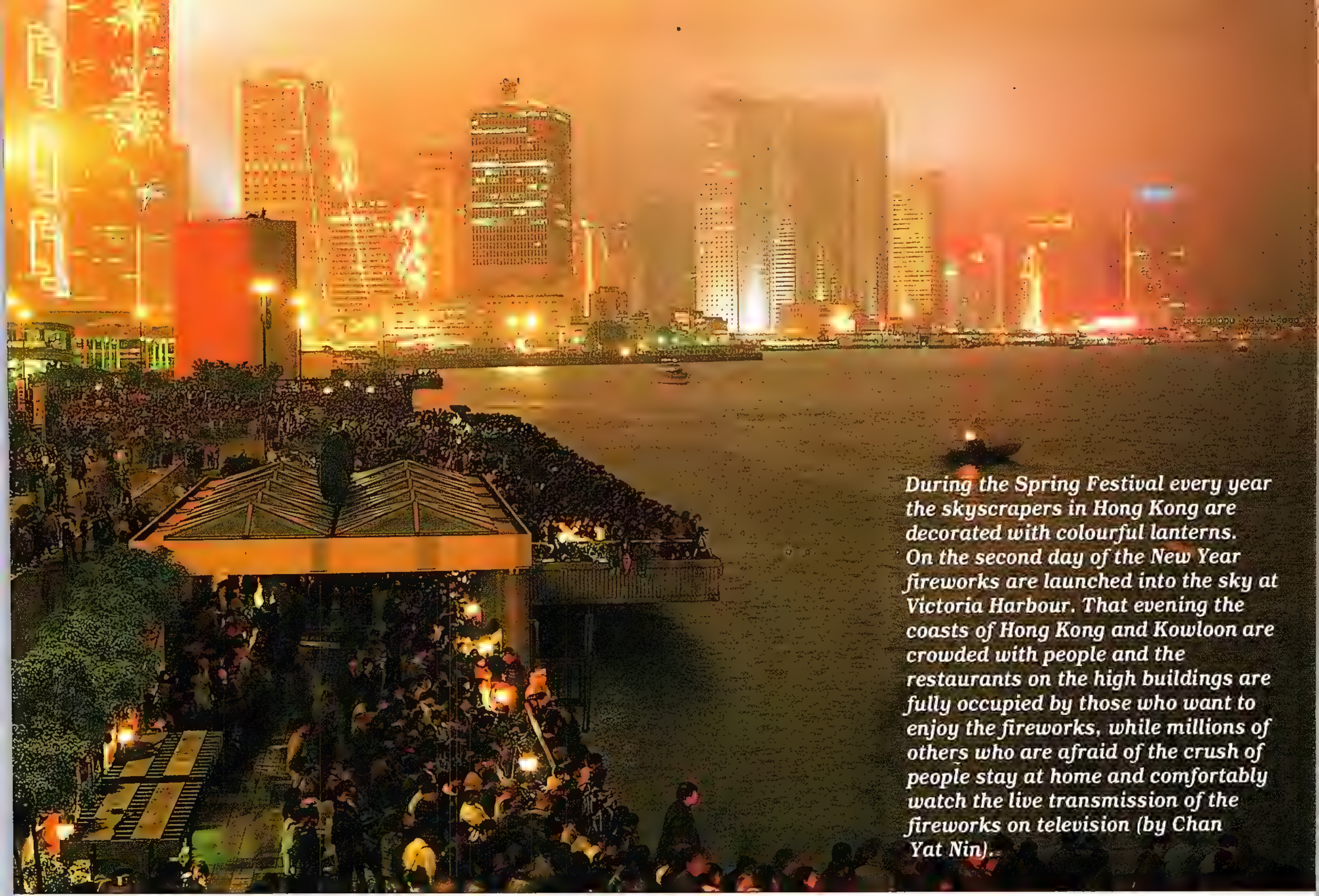


From the fourteenth to the sixteenth day of the first lunar month is the period when all the folks, old and young, in Shengfang Town, Hebei Province are immersed in the Lantern Festival celebrations. As the town is situated in water country, the lanterns are often made in the shapes of fish and ducks (by Wang Miao).

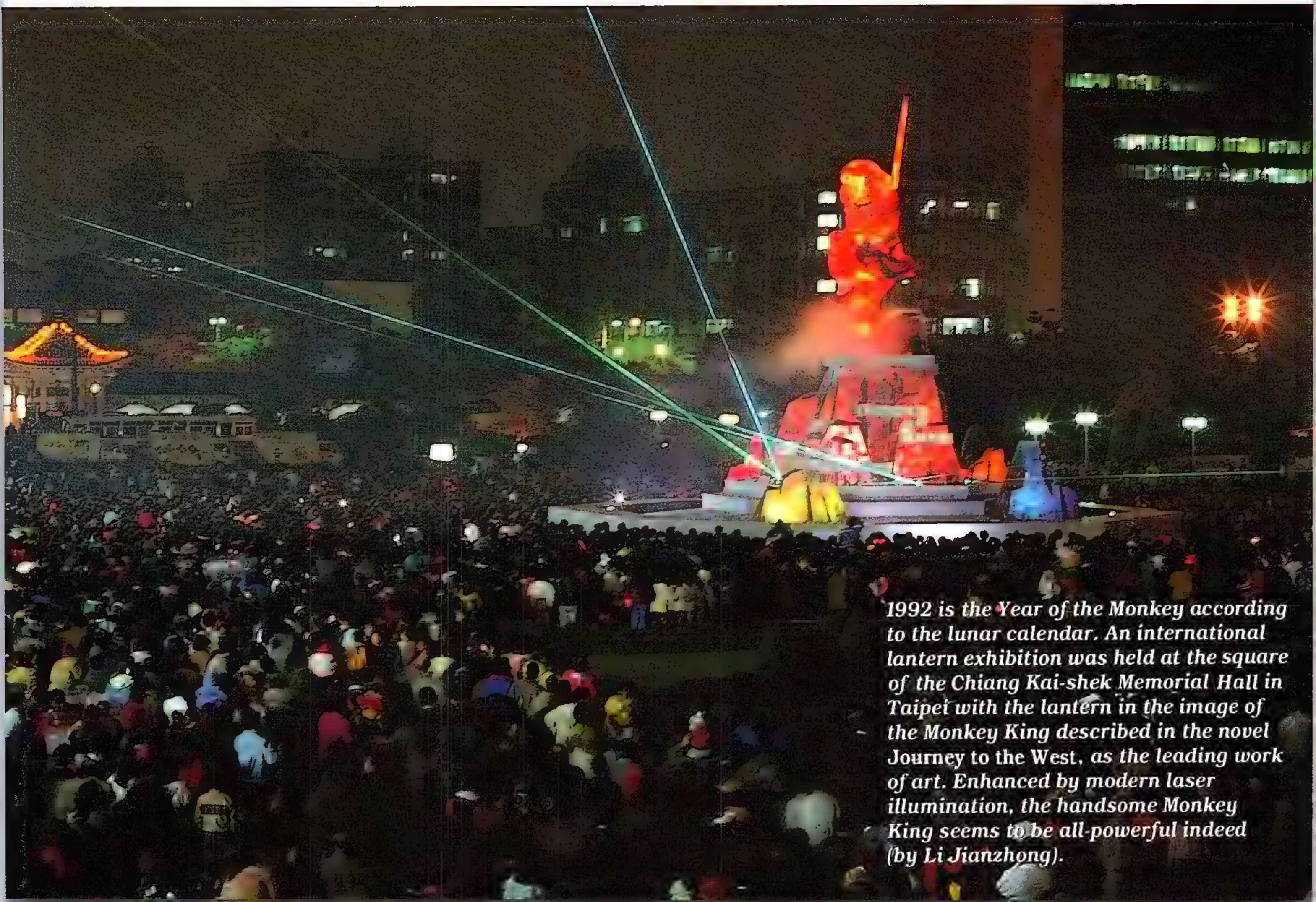


The greatest dinosaur fossil group in the world unearthed to date was discovered in Zigong, Sichuan Province. This event has transformed the traditional Lantern Festival into the Dinosaur Lantern Festival. During the Lantern Festival the dinosaur lanterns can be seen everywhere in the city. These are dragon lanterns made of porcelain (by Lin Yipin

The danceable Dragon Lanterns come in all manner of forms and shapes. The inhabitants of the city of Fengcheng in Jiangxi dance holding the bench-shaped Dragon Lantern. Every family in Zhentou District contributes one section to join in a long dragon lantern. The longest one may exceed 300 metres in length (by Li Qing).

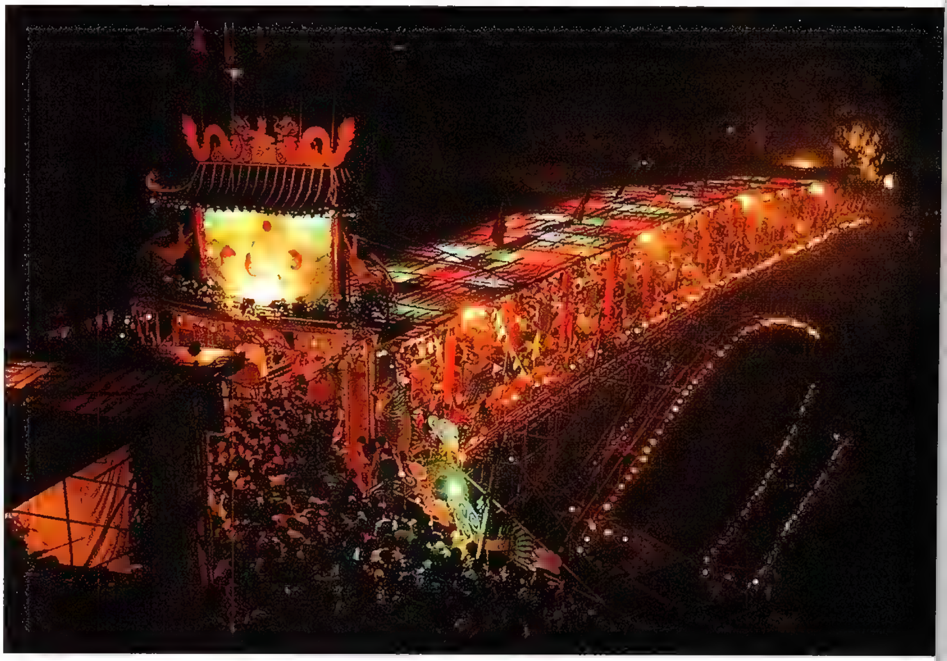


During the Spring Festival every year the skyscrapers in Hong Kong are decorated with colourful lanterns. On the second day of the New Year fireworks are launched into the sky at Victoria Harbour. That evening the coasts of Hong Kong and Kowloon are crowded with people and the restaurants on the high buildings are fully occupied by those who want to enjoy the fireworks, while millions of others who are afraid of the crush of people stay at home and comfortably watch the live transmission of the fireworks on television (by Chan Yat Nin).

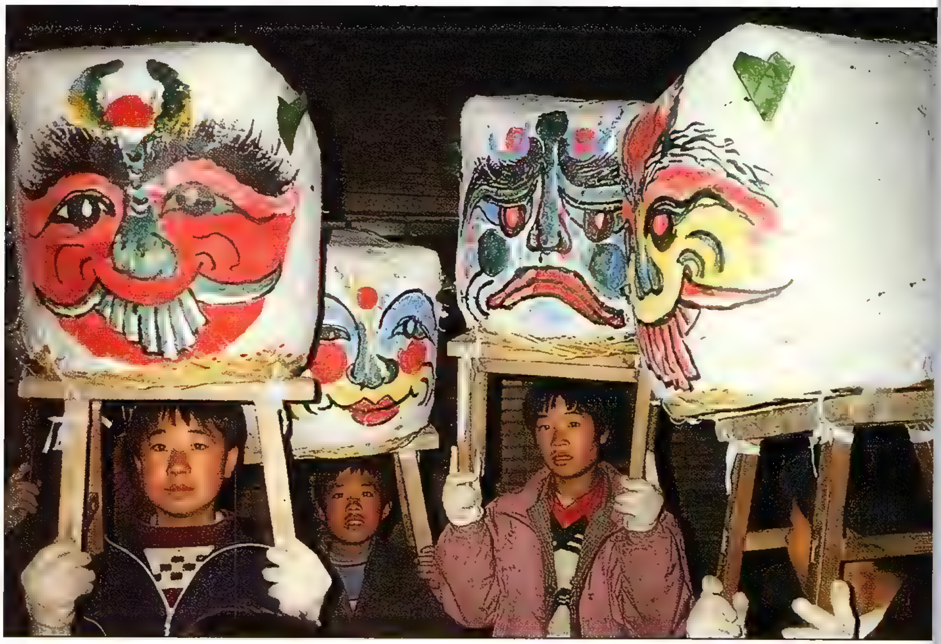


1992 is the Year of the Monkey according to the lunar calendar. An international lantern exhibition was held at the square of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei with the lantern in the image of the Monkey King described in the novel Journey to the West, as the leading work of art. Enhanced by modern laser illumination, the handsome Monkey King seems to be all-powerful indeed (by Li Jianzhong).

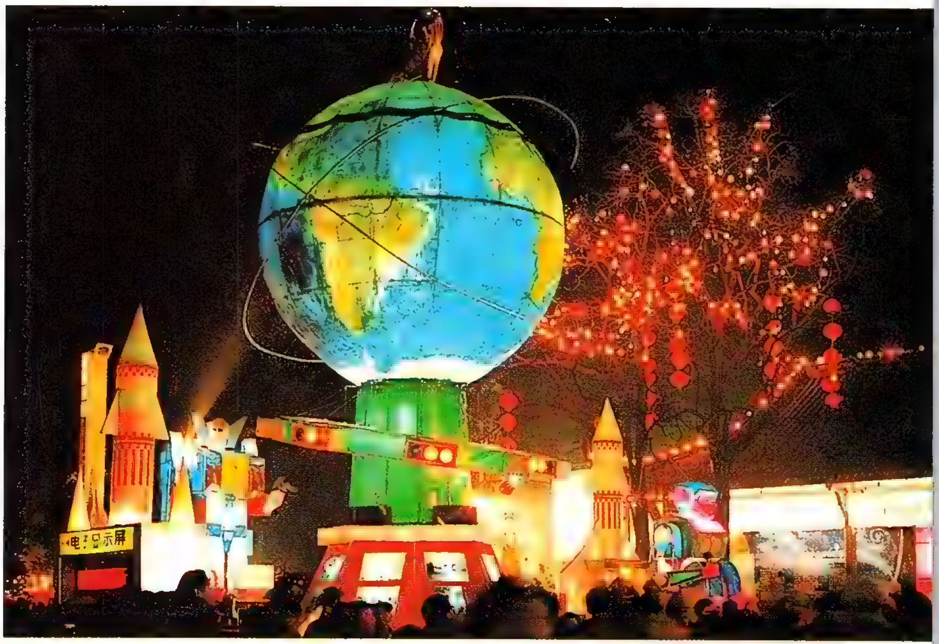
The town of Meilu in Wuchuan County, Guangdong Province has kept alive an old tradition for the celebration of the Lantern Festival – the custom known as "visiting the flower bridge". A four-metre-wide bridge is built over the Meijiang River, on which hang large illuminated red lanterns decorated with auspicious words. The sides of the bridge are lined with colourful flowers. Local young men and girls scramble for the flowers after they have visited the bridge (by Zheng Guoqing).

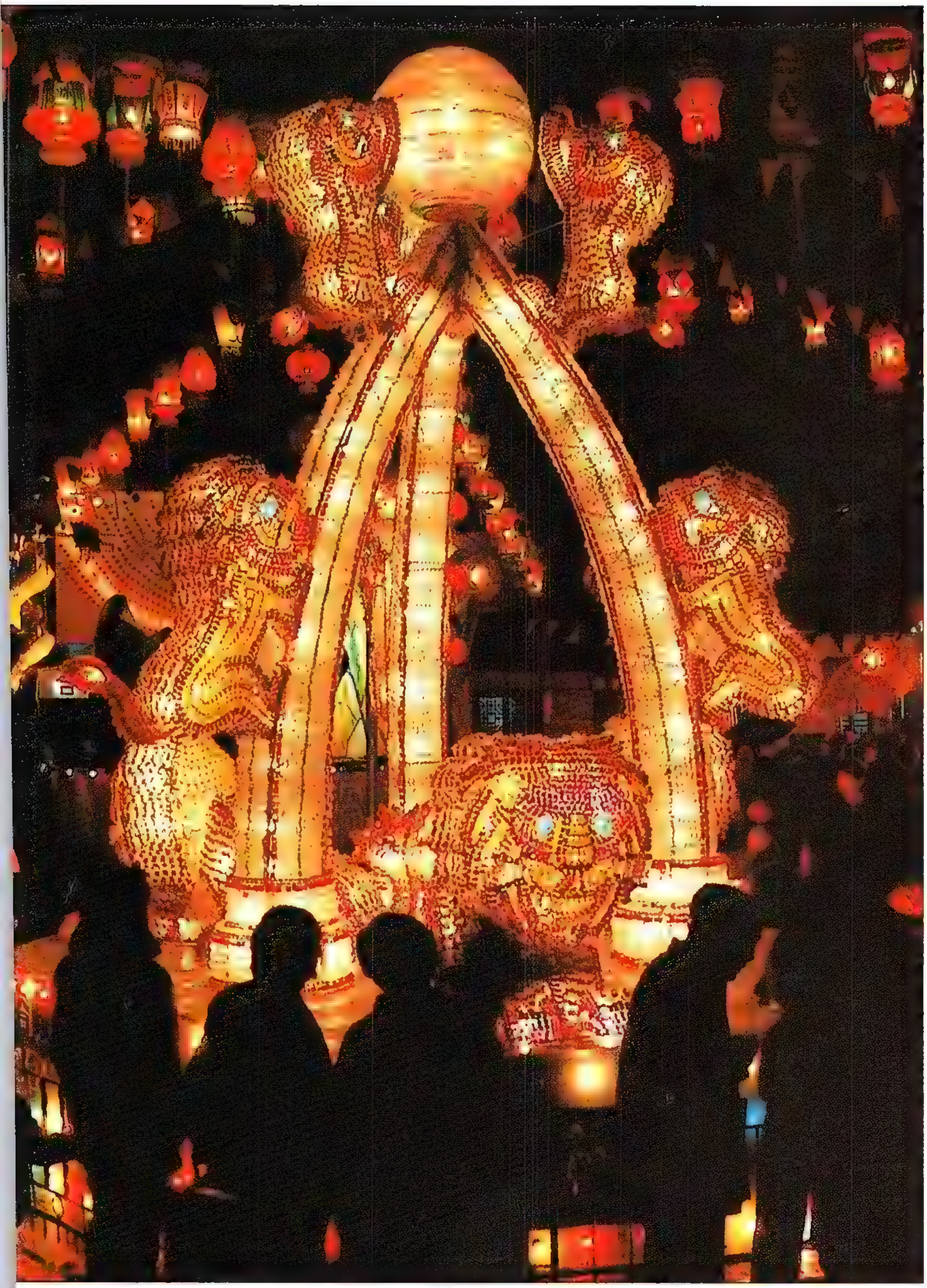


The fishermen of Cuizhuangzi Village of Shengfang Town in Hebei Province are dancing with the Bamboo Fishing Net Lantern at the Lantern Festival in order to scare away the evil spirits and pray for good harvests in the coming year (by Feng Weilie).



Xichang in Sichuan is China's base for launching satellites and hence at the Lantern Festival in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, appear lanterns symbolizing the Space Age – here imitations of the Long March I and Long March II missiles and more (by Liu Guangfu).





People from all walks of life make lanterns with materials used in making their products showing the prosperity of their profession. This lantern at the Lantern Festival in Hefei, Anhui Province with the classic design of lions playing with the silk ball is made up of over 10,000 medicine bottles (by Kang Shiwei).

Pancun Village in Kaiping County, Guangdong Province has a population of over 10,000 people who have the custom to venerate their ancestors and pay homage to what they call the Divine Lantern. First they venerate their ancestors under the guiding light of the lantern, then they honour the Divine Lantern and finally they scramble for a piece of the lantern. Even a small piece of it is a symbol of good auspices (by Lin Yulin).

Lantern Festival — The Climax of the Spring Festival

The Spring Festival is characterized by profound rejoicing — rejoicing over spring, over country performances and over colourful lanterns while the climax of this joy is the Lantern Festival.

To celebrate the festival people begin from the tenth day and continue to the sixteenth or even the seventeenth. All are overwhelmed by the great celebration and the exciting gaiety spreads throughout the whole nation as the people are as well moved by ancestral veneration. But for the first full-moon of the year which symbolizes the climax of the Spring Festival nothing could hold back the torrents of happiness.

Rising above the acme of activity are soaring spirits, and liberated souls. As in spring, hope is eternal....

Translated by Gu Weizhou

1. *On the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the people from Quyang County, Hebei Province wait at the entrance to the village for the Shehuo teams (by Wang Miao.)*

2. *On the day of the Lantern Festival this old lady in the city of Xiangfan in Hubei Province is meticulously dressing herself, ready to compete with young girls in the land boat dance (by Han Lu).*

3. *This is the scene of rural jubilation at the Longtan Temple Fair in Beijing (by Yang Shizhong).*

4 *This is the Flag Team on parade in Pujiang County in Zhejiang. The flags bear Chinese water-and-ink paintings (by Song Mingliang).*

5. *From the third to the eighteenth day of the first lunar month, the people in Fuyang County, Zhejiang Province have the customary Bamboo Horse Dance for recreation (by Ye Shenggao).*

6. *At the Lantern Festival, the people in Funan County of Anhui Province are carrying out a traditional folk activity called "the Elbow Song". The young actors and actresses perform a play standing on an iron frame carried by strong men, with four men dressed like Wuchang Ghosts pioneering the way. The plays have the contents inspired by traditional novels such as* Outlaws of the Marsh, The White Snake *and* Journey to the West *(by Kang Shiwei).*

7. *On Lantern Festival the people from the town of Qintong in Taixian County, Jiangsu Province are rendering a performance of a dragon boat dance along the river. Such a difficult feat portraying two dragons playing with a pearl while on board a boat can be seen only in the northern part of Jiangsu Province (by Guo Dechang & Cheng Jianping).*

8. *The Louguan (Observation) Terrace in Zhouzhi County, Shaanxi, is the place where Laozi, founder to Taoist philosophy, once taught. The fifteenth day of the first month is his birthday and hundreds of Taoist faithful flock to the temple fair (by Hu Wugong).*

9. *In Kunming, Yunnan, on the tenth day of the first month, the Va girls dance while swaying the hair to the rhythm of the Elephant Foot Drums (by Zhu Gongfu).*

10 *On the fifteenth day of the first month the villagers of Xiayang Village in Yongding County, Fujian Province, are cooking the rice meal, a staple food of Hakkas living in the western part of Fujian (by Lin Xiaoyu).*

11. *On the Lantern Festival the people in Shenyang, capital of Liaoning Province, come out in spite of the severe cold to see the performance given by the* yangko *team (by Wang Yi).*

12. *During the Lantern Festival, many performances are given in the streets in the city of Chaozhou in Guangdong Province. These old men dressed in Western style clothes are performing the Chaozhou Gong and Drum Beating Ritual (by Huang Xuan).*

13. *The people in Suide County in northern Shaanxi have the custom to rejoice over what they call the Lesser New Year on the traditional Lantern Festival (by Feng Weilie).*

14. *During the Lantern Festival, people in the city of Guanghan in Sichuan launch their fireworks in a unique way: first melting iron in a small furnace and then splashing the liquid iron into the sky with spades, they dance the Dragon Dance under the light of iron sparkles (by Wang Miao).*

15. *On the thirteenth day of the first month the temple fair for the Lantern Festival held in the colourfully decorated Tianhou Temple in Quanzhou, Fujian Province is now under way (by Shangguan Zhonghua).*

16. *Wuqiao in Hebei Province is the home of acrobats. When at home during the Spring Festival, they perform acrobatic feats for everyone's enjoyment (by Shen Ying).*

17. *Stilt-walking performances in Bazhou City, Hebei Province on the fifteenth day of the first month (by Wang Miao)*

18 *The shops and stores in Wuzhou in Guangxi invite the Lion Dance Team to perform in front of their shops. One item of the performance is called "Picking the Verdure" — the lion picks up a roll of vegetable hung on the signboard and then spits it out. This symbolizes that the shop would earn much money. The Lion Dance of Picking the Verdure is also popular in Guangdong and Hong Kong (by Qin Jiang).*

19. *In Quyang, Hebei, a little girl imitating the Goddess of the Moon is standing on the head of a man, with a rabbit in her arms on the eighth day of the first month (by Wang Miao).*

20. *The land boats of Luoyang, Henan, are made of silk. The boat carriers are generally dressed up as ancient heroes in mythological stories (by Liu Wenmin).*

21. *A village opera is being staged in the countryside in Lishi County of Shanxi Province while this vendor is selling rattle-drums to the children (by Shan Xiaogang).*

22. *The huge drums of Quyang County, Hebei Province (by Wang Miao)*

23. *During the Lantern Festival the farmers in northern Shaanxi like to play on the swing. Even old villagers seem to be rejuvenated when they are swung high in the sky (by Qiu Xiaoming).*

24. *This is a performance at Shanhaiguan Pass, known as the First Pass Under Heaven, in Qinhuangdao, Hebei Province. The Dragon Dance stands out against the background of the Great Wall (by Yu Gui).*

25. *A vignette from the earthen building in Xiayang Village in Yongding County, Fujian Province — the adults are preparing the coloured lanterns while the children are anxious to lend a hand (by Lin Xiaoyu).*

26. *At the temple fair held in the Temple of the Earth in Beijing, the theatrical masks painted in the image of the panda are selling well (by Wang Wenlan).*

27. *Yangliuqing in Tianjin is famous for its New Year pictures. In the street there are girls performing a dance while holding a fish in their hands — an auspicious sign symbolizing the abundance wished for every year (by Feng Weilie).*

28. *On Lantern Festival Day the "Younger Sister Lantern Performance" is given by performers at Bazi in Sichuan Province. The man wears a mask portraying a monk with a large head while the woman with highly-tilted braids is heavily rouged on the cheeks (by Lai Wu).*

29. *The Lantern Festival in Zibo, Shandong Province, is renowned far and wide. All the inhabitants, men and women, old and young, come out into the streets. The Dragon Dance Teams and other recreational groups converge on the square at the centre of the city, which becomes a sea of people and dragons (by Hou Heliang).*

30. *One of the events of the Lantern Festival in Quzhou County, Hebei Province is the farce of "Pigsy Robbing the Bride", an episode from the novel* Journey to the West *(by Li Guoguang).*

31 *The performance on stilts given in Shantou, Guangdong, by the team from Haicheng, Liaoning Province brings to southerners a sense of northern rustic simplicity, as this kind of performance is popular only in northern China (by Weng Zhixiong).*

32. *During the Spring Festival, gatherings and parties are held everywhere. This is a New Year's Party held in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (by Chen Yajiang).*

33. *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, a spectacle in Jingxing County, Hebei Province called Dian Huang Gang recreates the scene of people in ancient times paying tribute to the emperor (by Ren Changqing).*

34. *This is a view at the Lantern Festival in Shexian County, Hebei Province. The tired father is taking a rest from playing the Lion Dance while the son is anxious to get inside the lion for the dance if an opportunity avails (by Wu Jian).*

35. *On the fifteenth day of the first month in Quyang, Hebei, this mandarin appears to be carried easily by the hand of the man underneath, without revealing the actual supporting technique (by Wang Miao).*

36. *The "Back Show" given at the Lantern Festival in Jiexiu, Shanxi Province is a performance given by a boy dressed in traditional costume and tied to an iron frame fixed on the shoulders of an adult who walks alongside (by Feng Weilie).*

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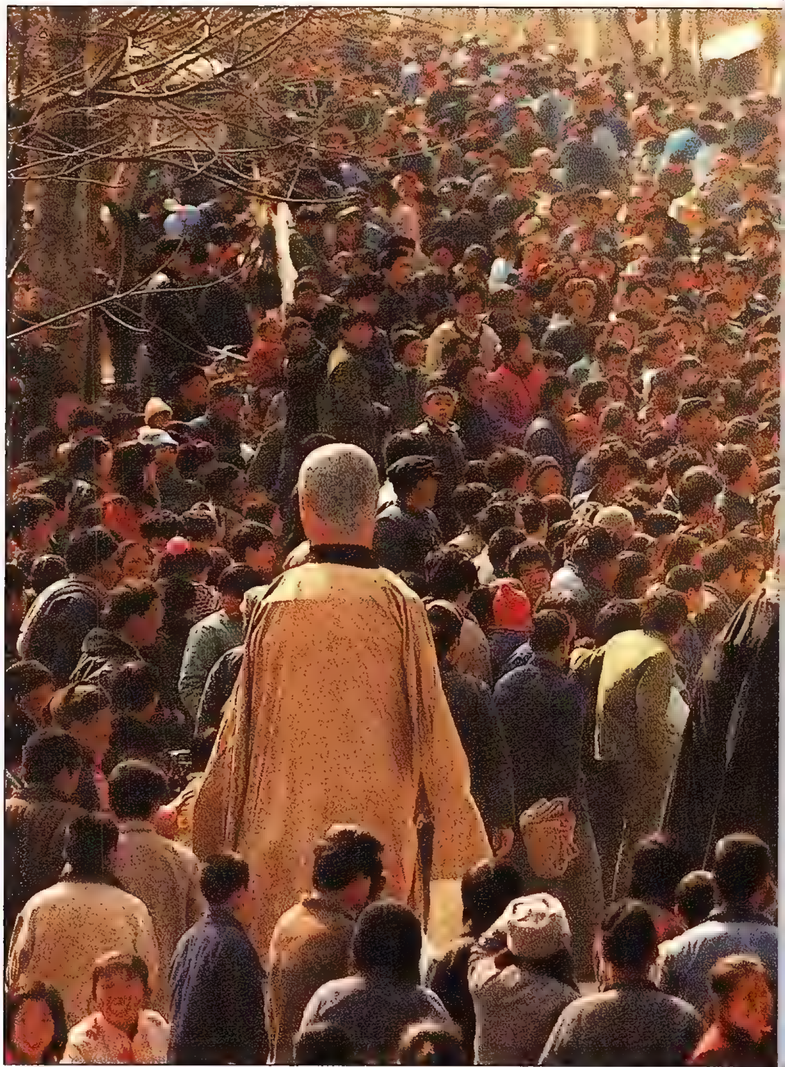

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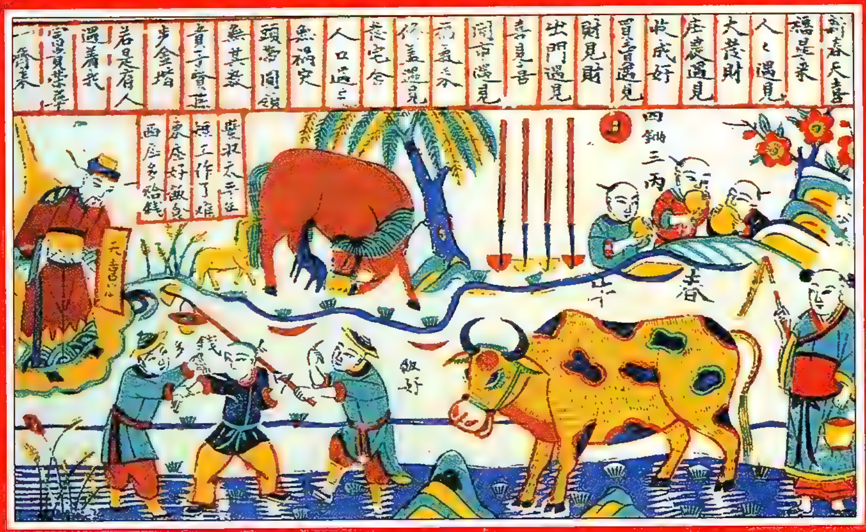
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福是來
人人遇見
大發財
庄農遇見
收成好
買賣遇見
財見財
出門遇見
喜見喜
開市遇見
春

The Whole Year's Work Depends on a Good Spring

After the festive activities associated with the New Year that people ceaselessly enjoy for a period of time, normal life resumes. The revellers now get into the disciplined frame of mind required for work or study. As the old saying goes, "The whole year's work depends on a good start in spring," Chinese people customarily make a plan for the new year to commence in spring. This is very important especially in a country with a traditionally agricultural society and economy such as China. The weather in spring and the preparation of spring ploughing more often than not are the critical determinant of the crop harvest during the coming year.

The Beginning of Spring is the earliest of China's twenty-four solar terms, and thus has been regarded as the beginning of the spring season. This day, usually around February 4, sometimes falls before the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), or after the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. In ancient times, as most of the farmers were totally uneducated, they made preparation for spring ploughing relying upon the yearly almanac. On the first page of this book, there is a picture of "Spring Buffalo" that marks the day of Beginning of Spring. Shown leading the buffalo in the picture is the God Arista, who is the deity of agriculture. If he stands in front of the buffalo pulling the animal forward, it suggests that the Beginning of Spring falls before the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month of the year. When he aligns with the buffalo, it means the first solar term will come between the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. If the animal is placed in front of him, the first solar term will arrive late, probably around the Lantern Festival. The picture of "Spring Buffalo" also foretells the weather and harvest conditions of the coming year. When the God Arista stands barefoot, it means there will be plenty of rain in the year. When his straw hat is red, there would be a year of drought. Even now one can still find a similar picture on the first page in almanacs sold on the streets.

In ancient times, people attached major importance to the arrival of the first solar term, hence the saying, "The Beginning of Spring is as grand as the New Year." On the eve of this day, emperors from various dynasties would lead officials to hold a grand ceremony to usher in spring; some would even personally put their hands to ploughing in order to demonstrate the significance of spring ploughings.

All the officials in the localities should take baths and wear plain clothes, then go on foot to the "Spring Ground" in the suburbs to welcome in the spring season with the villagers. They took the lead to kowtow and pray for happiness. The core of the ceremony was "beating the spring buffalo". Acting as the God Arista, a *yamen* runner whipped the buffalo made of clay, supposedly to purge it of sloth so that it would work hard during spring ploughing. When the clay buffalo was broken and the kernels of the five cereals which were stuffed beforehand into the belly of the animal dropped on the ground, the villagers, men and women, old and young, all rushed to pick the kernels or pieces of clay from the broken buffalo and brought them home. They softened the chunks of clay with water and pasted them on the palisades of their cattle pens or stoves. They believed this practice would help livestock flourish in the coming year. Additionally, they also thought that they would have a bumper harvest thanks to the corn they had brought home and placed in their barns. Later, the clay buffalo was replaced by one made from reeds and paper but the significance remained unchanged.

Apart from beating the spring buffalo, on this occasion people would also drink spring wine and eat spring dishes. The brewing of spring wine begins in winter and is served at the Beginning of Spring. The spring dishes include such ingredients as celery, chives and bamboo shoots, symbolizing diligence, eternity and prosperity.

As a matter of fact, the activities associated with the Beginning of Spring mainly aim to persuade farmers to make timely preparations for spring ploughing. On the other hand, they also pray to the God of the Earth for a bumper harvest. This ritual is usually carried on between the Beginning of Spring and the Spring Equinox.

The God of the Earth is said to be Goulong, a son of Gonggong, the Water God. Legend has it that Gonggong, a man of a fiery temper, once got mad and knocked down the post used to prop up the sky, resulting in holes in the sky and cracks on the earth. Later, Nüwa smelted stones of five different colours to repair the vault of heaven while Goulong filled up the cracks on the earth. Greatly appreciated by Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor) Goulong was granted an official title and appointed to take charge of the earth. His posterity thus held a ceremony dedicated to his memory known as Qinian (praying for a bumper harvest). This ceremony has become a traditional ritual handed down from generation to generation.

Most of the emperors considered this ritual to be significant. They built sacrificial altars for the ceremony. The top of the altar was divided into five sections corresponding to the traditional five directions – east, south, west, north and centre and paved with soil of five correlating colours – green, red, white, black and yellow respectively to respresent soil from all five directions of the country. In Beijing, the imperial altar of the Ming and Qing Dynasties has been well preserved in Zhongshan Park facing Tian'anmen Square.

For common people, they would set up mat sheds on that day, and offer slaughtered cattle and wine to the God of the Earth before this food and drink would be served at their dinner party.

After the Beginning of Spring and the spring sacrificial ceremony, some regions of the country would worship the Silkworm God, praying for the prosperity of sericulture. When the Barn Filling Festival on the 25th day of the first lunar month comes, the joyous Spring Festival draws to a close.

The Barn Filling Festival is actually one of the folk celebration days to symbolize the wish for a bumper crop harvest, which is clear from the name of the festival. A legend says that once upon a time a drought took place and it was a year of crop failure. Unable to bear the sight of many people dying of starvation, a local official in charge of the imperial granary decided by himself to open the granary to save potential victims. Being well aware that this would greatly offend the emperor, he set fire to the granary on the 25th day of the first lunar month and he himself was also consumed by the flames. To commemorate this righteous official, people spread straw or firewood ashes everywhere inside and outside their courtyards in the shape of a round granary edged with auspicious patterns or characters and sprinkled cereals within the circles.

Since ancient times China has had an agriculturally-based economy. Rainfall and soil fertility are the essential factors for farming. In early spring people would pray for favourable weather and bumper crops during the coming year. Today farmers mostly usher in spring according to traditional customs. However, urban residents following a different lifestyle like to go on outings to the countryside in order to appreciate the charm of spring when flowers are blooming, or to ascend mountains to enjoy a panoramic view of spring landscapes. Although people greet this annual time for renewal in different ways, spring is to all full of vitality that brings everyone boundless hope for prosperity.

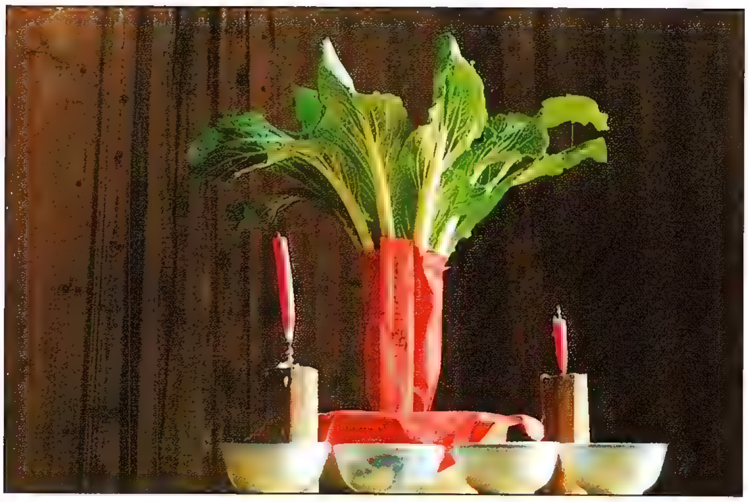
Translated by K.V. Ku

As early as on the third day of the first lunar month, fishermen of Lishui City in Zhejiang Province assemble on the Oujiang River for the Kaichuan *(First Sail) ceremony. Casting a net while rowing, they are also busy lighting candles and burning joss-sticks to pray for a rich catch in the coming new year (by Chu Xiaoqing).*

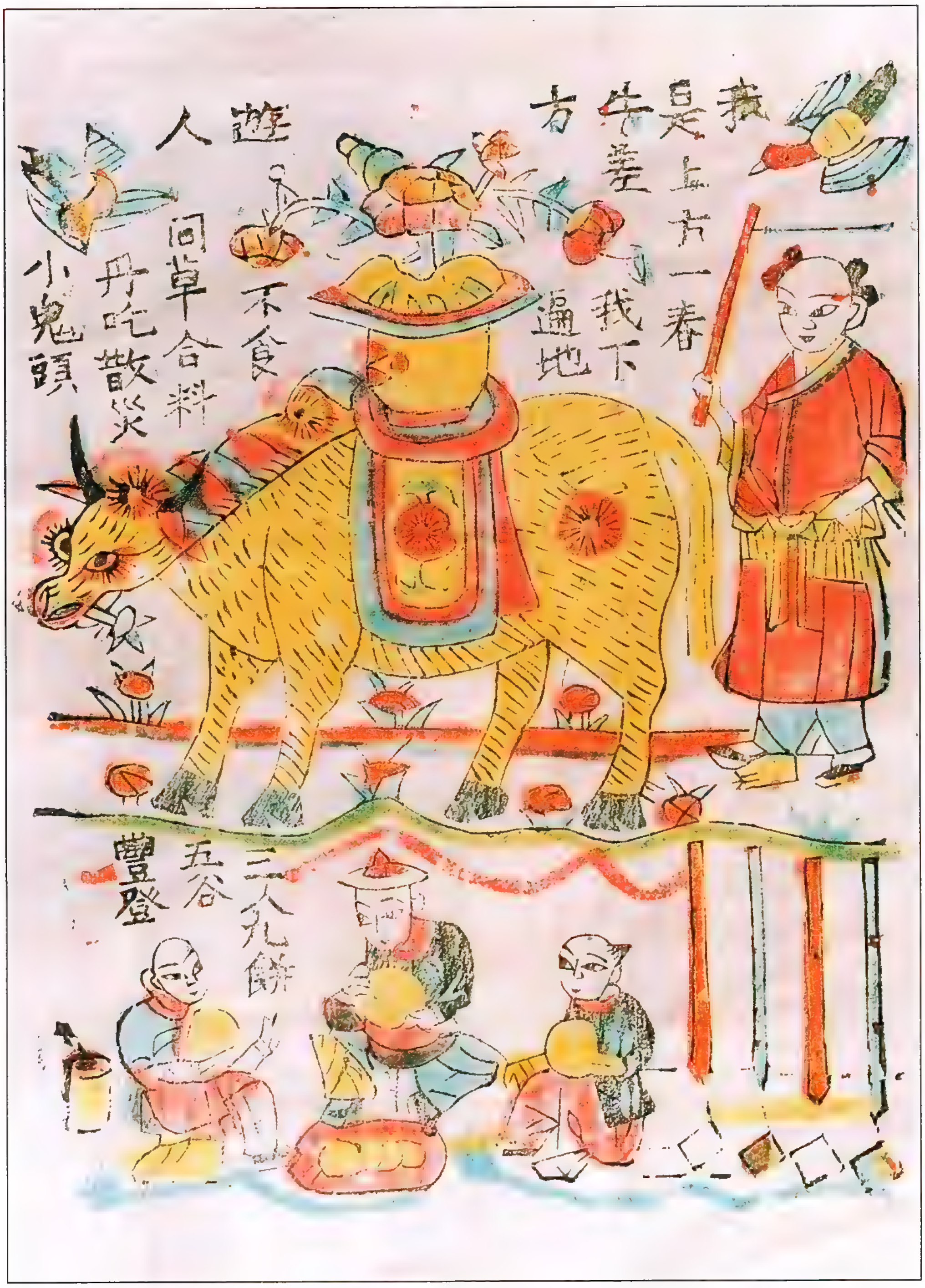
As soon as the busy Spring Festival is over, people make preparations for spring ploughing and sowing. In Huachi County, Qingyang, Gansu Province, the mountains are high and the gullies deep. Seeds for sowing can only be brought here by donkeys (by Wei Fengzheng).

In Shexian County, Hebei Province brothers and sisters-in-law would bring their younger sisters to rake the soil level during the spring ploughing season (by He Yuejin).

On the day of the Beginning of Spring people in Yushan County, Jiangxi Province select a Chinese cabbage and transplant it into a flowerpot. Then they wrap the pot with red paper or cloth written with Chinese characters "Welcome Spring and Fortune". It is kept until the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month (by Qiu Bingyan).



The fifth day of the first lunar month is the day of Horse Castration on the Hulun Buir Grassland in Inner Mongolia. Mongolian herdsmen drive their horses together to a selected spot to display their skills in wielding the lasso, making preparations for spring herding (by Xu Xuezhe).


我是上方一春
牛差我下
方遍地
遊人不食
同草合料
丹吃散災
小鬼頭
三人丸餅
五谷
豐登

This picture of the "Spring Buffalo" reflects a spring welcoming ceremony in Shanxi Province. On the eve of the Beginning of Spring, a villager acts as the God Arista and others beat the clay buffalo. This ritual is called Beating the Spring Buffalo or Beating Spring, that is to request the co-operation of buffaloes with farmers working during spring (by Liu Yinqing).

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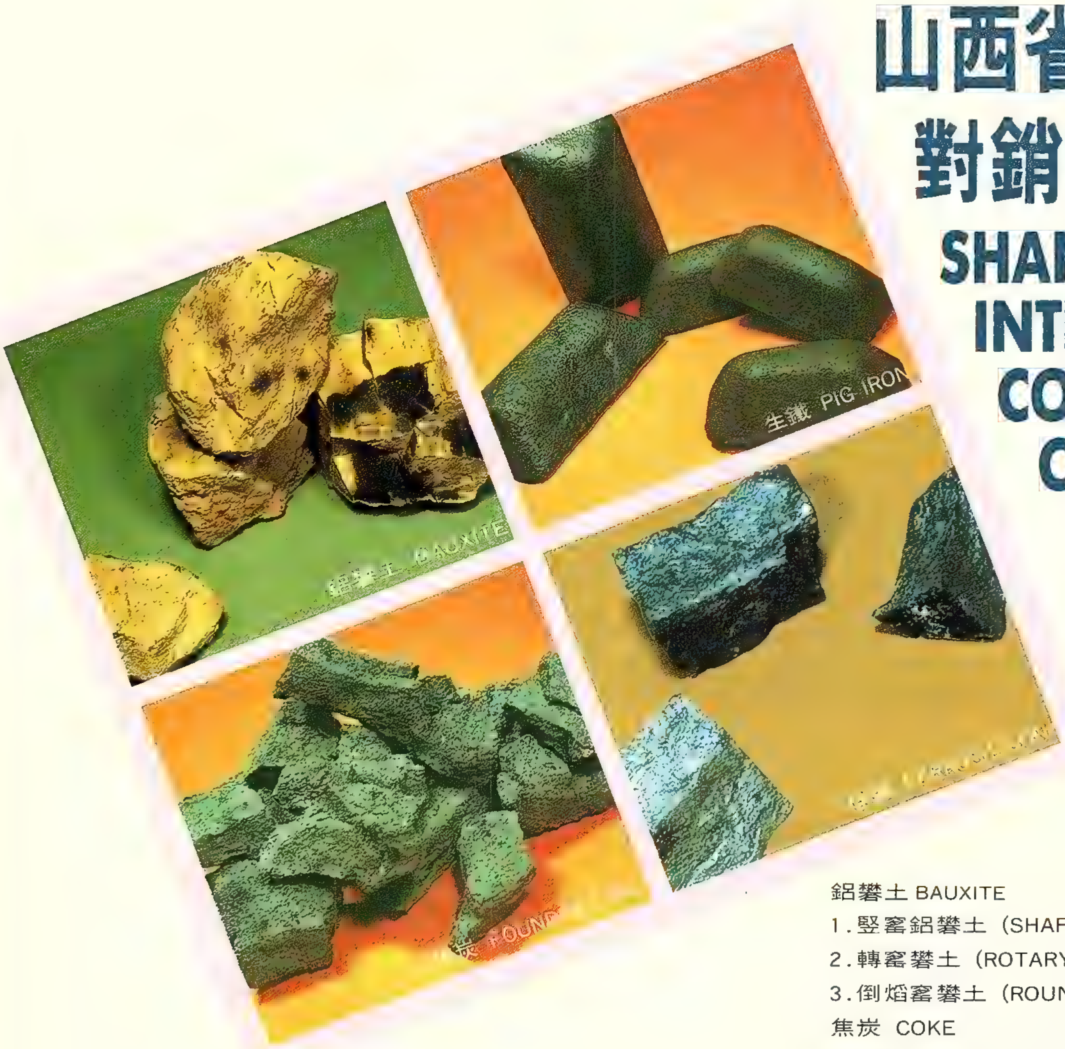

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鑄造焦 (FOUNDRY COKE)
冶金焦 (METALLURGICAL COKE)
生鐵 (PIG IRON)
規格 (SPECIFICATIONS)

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磷含量 (P)	(0.2%)	MAX
硫含量 (S)	(0.05%)	MAX
碳含量 (C)	(3.3%)	MIN
錳含量 (Mn)	(0.9%)	MAX
單塊重量 (WEIGHT PER PIECE)		3—15KG

硅鐵 (FERROSILICON)
規格 (SPECIFICATIONS)

硅 (SI)	75%	MIN
鋁 (AL)	2 %	MAX OR 1.5% MAX
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硫 (S.)	0.02%	MAX
磷 (P.)	0.04%	MAX
粒度 (SIZE)	10—100MM90% MIN	
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Fireworks and Firecrackers of Liuyang and Dongguan

Fireworks and firecrackers are a must for celebrating festive occasions. The best fireworks and firecrackers in China are produced in Liuyang, Hunan Province and Dongguan, Guangdong Province.

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Liuyang
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HUNAN
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The Historical Evolution of Fireworks and Firecrackers

To set off firecrackers during the Spring Festival is a Chinese custom more than 2,000 years old. Firecrackers originated during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220). At that time when people burned bamboo, they heard cracking sounds, hence, the name *baozhu* (cracking bamboo) in Chinese or firecrackers.

It is said that to set off firecrackers on the eve of the Chinese New Year was originally a means to dispel monsters and evil spirits. In ancient times there was a monster called Nian. Every year on New Year's Eve, it would come out to harm people. It struck terror into people's hearts. To repulse it, people eventually found its weakness. It feared the colour red, the light of fire and loud sound. So every family pasted red paper on their doors, lit fires in their courtyards, beat drums and gongs and burned bamboo. Since gunpowder had not yet been invented, the burned bamboo exploded, giving off loud noises. After that, Nian disappeared and the people led a peaceful life. The custom of pasting up red paper inscribed with couplets, setting fires and setting off firecrackers has continued down through the centuries.

Later on after gunpowder was invented, people discovered that when they put gunpowder into bamboo tubes and ignited them, they gave out even louder noises. Thus a new type of firecracker came into existence more closely resembling the modern style. By and by people replaced bamboo tubes with paper tubes and plaited them into strings with hemp stems. This kind of firecracker was called the plaited firecracker. It was also called the whip firecracker because it gave out crisp sounds like that of a whip cracking.

It is a violet chemical reaction when firecrackers explode. When burned, charcoal, sulphur, the oxidizing ingredient and potassium nitrate set off a huge quantity of heat and gases mainly consisting of nitrogen and carbon dioxide. Thanks to the ensuing pressure, its size almost instantaneously becomes 1,000 times bigger. This makes the paper tube explode, causing crisp and cracking sounds.

Fireworks and Firecrackers of Liuyang

Chinese firecrackers were sold to Southeast Asia as early as in the beginning of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1875-1908) during the Qing Dynasty. Historically Liuyang has been a major firecracker producer. In the past a small quantity of fireworks for the court and officials was made here. Later on, the town emphasized the development of fireworks. Thanks to the widespread use of salts for pigmentation, oxidants and additional ingredients, more new varieties of fireworks are now produced than ever before. The variety of Liuyang fireworks and firecrackers has increased from a dozen to more than three hundred different kinds. Of these more than fifty varieties are most famous. There are firecrackers which give out single, double or multiple bursts and those which release resounding sounds and fragrant smells as well as colourful smoke. Liuyang fireworks are characterized by their great variety, novel combustion structures and beautiful colours. When fireworks are set off, there are colours as well as sounds, enlivening the atmosphere and rousing people's spirits at festival time.

People from various countries give a high evaluation of Liuyang's fireworks and firecrackers. The Red Lantern brand fireworks and firecrackers produced at Liuyang is a name-brand product on the world market and has sold well in more than fifty countries and regions including U.S.A., Japan, Australia, Thailand, Hong Kong, etc.

These Red Lantern brand fireworks and firecrackers produced in Hunan come in a wide range. Besides its two main varieties — large and toy types — the latter is further subdivided into fountains, hand-held novelties, nail and hanging wheels, ground pinwheels and jumping novelties, floral shells, parachutes, rockets and others.

Beautifully and attractively packaged, these products have been rapidly developed. To meet international market demand, Hunan Province has created additional products. An encouragement was given to these products produced in Hunan in 1986 when they were awarded a prize at the "Monaco International Fireworks Show Competition".

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The Fireworks and Firecrackers of Dongguan

The city of Dongguan adjacent to Hong Kong has always been known as a "hometown for swimmers". In recent years, it has also become one of the major litchi-producing areas in Guangdong Province so it is also known as a "hometown of litchi". But few people know that it has another claim to fame as a "hometown of fireworks".

According to ancient manuscripts, as far back as three hundred years ago, Dongguan began making fireworks and firecrackers. More recently, by the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1875-1908) of the Qing Dynasty, Dongguan had numerous workshops making fireworks and firecrackers. It was estimated that during this time, about ten thousand people were engaged in this trade, thus, it is easy to imagine how prosperous the trade was at that time.

Even today Dongguan's firework and firecracker production is still thriving. It is famed for its fine quality and variety. These products are sold to more than fifty countries and regions in Europe, the Americas and Southeast Asia. The vivid colours have made them very popular among customers. Dongguan fireworks include nine major categories: fireworks ignited on platforms, frames or on the ground, fireworks set off by hand or on water, fireworks rising high in the sky and smaller fireworks climbing to lower altitudes, rotating fireworks, and toy fireworks. Within these nine categories of fireworks are over 470 specifications. While incorporating the best of tradition, the craftsmen also continuously innovate to strive to keep up with the state of the art as well as having their displays mimic life artistically.

Dongguan Fireworks and Firecrackers Factory, believed to be the biggest in the industry within the city, has a proud history of developing new varieties of fireworks to meet the demands of domestic and international markets.

Translated by Anne Yan

Several Traditional Folk Activities of the Spring Festival

Ladies in Beijing specially dressed for the temple fair (by Wang Wenbo)

Beijing People Visiting Temple Fairs

Visiting market or temple fairs has always been one of the Beijing residents' favourite pastimes. The latter, in particular, is a traditional folk activity with a strong local Beijing character as practised in the capital.

The temple fairs of Beijing, originating in the Liao Dynasty (916-1125), were then called "Shangsi" (a spring tour held at the beginning of the third lunar month). These fairs later became very popular in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and were yet further developed in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The temple fairs were known as "Sheji" during this time, where people offered sacrifices to the village god so that the buildings themselves were called temples housing the village god as well. Among the many temple fairs in Beijing, the Changdian Temple Fair has been considered as the most exciting one. Changdian, once a street with only a dozen households, is located outside the Heping (Peace) Gate in the southern part of Beijing. It is recorded that a market fair is held here every year from the first to the fifteenth of the first lunar month (generally in February), with pedlars coming from all parts of the city to set up stalls to sell books, pictures, antiques, daily necessities, sundry goods, toys, foods, drinks and fruits. Besides, opera troupes could be seen here exhibiting acrobatics and other presentations accompanied by drums and gongs; thus the temple fair has attracted many spectators and is fully packed with visitors.

Every Spring Festival, Changdian is open to all. The largest temple fair was held in 1963, with more thant 750 stalls lining from the end of the city moat outside the Heping Gate to the crossroad of the Hufang Bridge, covering a length of 1.5 kilometres. The temple fair was jam-packed with people coming and going all the time, with the visitors totalling more than four million person-time. Consequently, it had to be held in some other places simply because of its increasing popularity and its narrow street.

However, the temple fair still retains a Changdian character with stalls selling thousands of commodities like cigarettes, wines, candies, dried and fresh fruits, local snacks, seafood, daily necessities, folk handicraft articles, gold and silver jewellery, windwheels, New Year pictures, diabolos, candied haws on a stick and many other wares.

The temple fair nonetheless has continued to change with the times as nowadays both Chinese and foreign performances, and both ancient and modern plays are actually enacted in contrast to the old practice of showing a foreign picture and chanting a story in verse to the accompaniment of a small drum.

In 1986, Beijing resumed the Ditan (Temple of Earth) Temple Fair which has now become the biggest attraction for Beijing natives during the Spring Festival. Apart from traditional local snacks, games and commodities, there are varied and colourful folk art performances during the temple fair, thus turning it into a large-scale amusement centre. In addition to the traditional lion dance, land boat dance and stilt dance, acrobatics and martial arts always provided enjoyable entertainment, with their stage property and costume displaying a rich folk flavour. The performers carrying on the heritage of their masters' tradition demonstrate their skills one after another.

In addition, places like Baiyun (White Cloud) Temple, Longtanhu (Dragon Pool Lake) Park, Gulou (Drum) Tower and Dazhong (Big Bell) Temple have been selected as sites for holding the Spring Festival temple fairs, among which the Baiyun Temple Fair is the one which most intrigues the local people, for the temple fair here ceased for nearly forty years from 1948 to 1987.

Baiyun Temple located outside the Xibian (West Side) Gate of Beijing is the first temple built by the Quanzhen Sect of Taoism. It has a history of more than 1,200 years. People here can not only appreciate the ancient traditional games or rituals like "touching the monkey while entering the door", "catching the temple fair by riding on donkeys" and "shooting the coin hole by the Wofeng Bridge riverside", but also enjoy watching entertainment programmes including cross talks, ballad-singing, story-telling, puppet shows and magic shows. Local snacks, folk handicraft articles and children's toys are also provided in the fair.

The legend behind "touching the monkey while entering the door" has it that there was no stone monkey previously on the door frame of Baiyun Temple. On the eve of the Spring Festival, an old mountain monkey living on the West Mountain of Beijing, who had become a celestial, felt like visiting the town of Beijing. Before reaching the town, he saw this ancient temple and stole into it. Enchanted by the pavilions, exotic flowers and rare trees inside the temple, the monkey thought to himself, if only I could move it into the West Mountain! Indulging in fantasy, the monkey abruptly felt a ray of red light over his head and looked up. As it turned out, it was Celestial Master Zhang who one dared not offend. Frightened, the monkey started running away at once. Attacked by the thunder thrown by the Celestial Master, the monkey, who was just outside the temple door, jumped onto the existing spot on the door frame. Having taken advantage of the opportunity, Celestial Master Zhang fixed the monkey in position by gesturing at him and turning him into a stone monkey.

One Spring Festival, there was a blind man approaching the temple, who was the first one to burn incense and pray. Close to the door fame, he felt so tired that he could hardly stand. It so happened that he placed his right hand on the stone monkey for support. Instantly, he could open his eyes and see everything clearly. The second one to come here was a barren woman who was driven to her maternal home on the Spring Festival. On her way she rested on the door frame when arriving at Baiyun Temple. Her hand touched the stone monkey unconsciously and she suddenly felt something moving in her belly. Before long, she gave birth to a chubby son. Since then, such miraculous stories have been circulated far and wide. Therefore, those who come to visit Baiyun Temple would not miss a chance to touch the stone monkey.

Lantern Festival in Beijing

The custom of hanging out lanterns on the night of the Lantern Festival (the fifteenth day of the first lunar month) in China originated in the Western Han Dynasty (206

B.C.-A.D. 24), and became very popular in the Tang Dynasty. Having assumed the throne after founding the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Taizu ordered that lanterns should be hung beginning from the night of the eighth day of the first lunar month. Emperor Zhudi of the Ming Dynasty even decreed that lanterns should be raised throughout the night to the accompaniment of popping firecrackers. Even the emperor and his concubines would view the beautifully decorated lanterns to share in the pleasures of his subjects.

There is a beautiful fairy tale about the Lantern Festival, which has aroused wide interest. Legend has it that in ancient times, a divine bird from heaven descended to earth and was wounded by a hunter, thus making the Jade Emperor, the ruler of heaven, furious, who then ordered that heavenly soldiers be sent to earth to burn all the human properties away on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. The kind-hearted youngest daughter of the Jade Emperor spread the unfortunate news to the mortals at her own risk. There was a panic upon hearing the news. An old man worked out a solution, asking each household to decorate their doors with red lanterns and to set off fireworks and firecrackers on the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth days of the first lunar month, to simulate the earth being on fire. Just as they expected, the Jade Emperor was finally taken in. In order to commemorate the victory, people established the custom of hanging out lanterns and coloured streamers and setting off fireworks during the three days before and after the fifteenth day of the first lunar month.

The Lantern Festival in Beijing became popular during the Qing Dynasty. Whenever the Lantern Festival would draw near, the imperial palace would be decorated with Aoshan (Turtle Mountain) Lanterns, inside which were placed some crickets which had been caught in the previous year. The crickets would chirp when the lanterns were lit internally by candles, which was really original. As elsewhere in Beijing, the fifteenth day of the first lunar month brings the Lantern Festival to a fitting climax. In the evening, people empty their houses and swarm into the street. Each shop will set off fireworks and firecrackers, with the exploding sound being continuously heard everywhere.

The lanterns produced by the ordinary people are displayed during the Lantern Festival in a variety of shapes, ranging from various palace lanterns to lanterns covered with gauze or flower. Some of the lanterns are painted with mountains, rivers, humans, flowers or birds; some of the lanterns are intricately constructed in the shape of a square, a hexagon, an octagon, a rectangle or even a basket with flowers.

The lanterns made in Beijing, available in a potpourri of styles, are finely processed and originally designed with an imperial court style. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, lantern artists of the hightest ability gathered in Beijing, thus forming a traditional character for Beijing lanterns represented by the palace lanterns covered with gauze. What are known as Wheat Dragon Lanterns, Wheat Man Lanterns and Ice Lanterns are even seen displayed among the people.

The Wheat Dragon Lantern is fashioned with a frame covered with cotton, on which wheat is scattered in the shape of a dragon. The lantern is then placed inside a warm room facing the sun. Moistened, young shoots of wheat would gradually come up, so that the dragon body has a dark green colour. They will be displayed in the public as long as the young shoots of wheat are two centimetres in height. The two dark green dragons are glaring and brandishing claws, as if they were going to speed across the sky.

The Wheat Man Lantern mainly depicts historical episodes or individual characters from such dramas or legends as the Empty City Stratagem (bluffing the enemy by opening the gates of a weakly defended city), the Monkey King Borrowing a Palm-Leaf Fan Three Times and so on.

Ice Lanterns originated in northeastern China, and were originally used by the Manchurians staying up late on New Year's Eve. Various places in northeastern China, particularly Harbin, are still well known for ice lanterns. Ice lanterns made in Beijing are not so big and magnificent as those in northeastern China. They are usually small and exquisite, and artistically worked into pavilions, palaces, human characters, animals, deities, monsters, celestial beings and more.

Ice Lanterns in Harbin

Similar to some old forms of art, ice lanterns, a traditional folk art in northern China, originated from activities involved in production and daily life.

Previously, the farmers raising horses along the Songnen Plain and the fishermen persisting in fishing during winter on the ice of the Songhua River often made ice lanterns for illumination. Water would be frozen in a pottery jar and then extracted before the ice was solid. Hollowed out in the centre, a small oil lamp could be set inside before pouring out the unfrozen water. Sheltered by the ice shade, the light could not be blown out by the cold wind. Now, whenever celebrating the Spring Festival and the Lantern Festival, some farmers make ice lanterns as well, which are either displayed beside the door of their houses or carried in the hand by means of a rope by children, thus enhancing the joyful atmosphere.

Such ice lanterns, however, which are made by ordinary people, are small in number, poor in quality and not so popular.

In 1963, in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China, the ice lanterns were arranged and exhibited on a large scale for the first time. The inaugural festival held in Harbin was a splendid example of ice art — a myriad of designs created by professional ice sculptors, ranging from exotic and delicate ice figures, looking as if they were inlaid with silver and jade, towering ice buildings, lofty ice mountain peaks, ice screens with a unique style to lively ice sculptures, new and original scenic spots rendered in small and exquisite ice miniature trees and rockery, thus changing the ice garden into universal genres of ice art.

The ice lantern, now transposed beyond the media of ice and snow, has become an art form depicting subjects from horticulture, architecture, sculpture, art, literature and even music, thus forming the unique milieu of an ice garden in northeastern China. Visitors can enjoy strolling in scenic spots featuring ice sculptures of buildings, pavilions, winding paths, perilous mountain peaks, rough caves, ancient and contemporary personalities, rare birds and animals and more ingeniously laid out and almost magically displaying in the solitary ice garden the pleasant character of the well-known parks around the world and the charm of mountains and rivers throughout China.

The annual Harbin Ice-and-Snow Festival is held in the Zhaolin Park, named after General Li Zhaolin, known for his efforts against the Japanese aggressors during the 1930's.

Every year, from January 5 to the end of February, a series of events are held in the city. With the passage of time and the concurrent expansion of the ice festival more motifs and increasing sophistication of ice art and ice sculpture combine to make the festival more popular. In addition, hundreds of people engage in winter swimming, cutting a big chunk out of the Songhua River and taking a dip in the icy water while the temperature outside dives below -30°C. An "Ice-Snow Delicacy Month" is also held in conjunction with the festival, where over 500 local and ice or snow dishes are available.

Nowdays, besides enjoying the ice sculptures during the festival visitors can also join in some commercial and trade activities which are held simultaneously in order to attract business and investment.

Translated by Yang Meizhen

Traditional Lunar and Solar Calendars — The Best of Both Worlds

The earliest traditional Chinese calendar, like that of every ancient civilization, is essentially lunar, as the phases of the moon were the easiest recurring phenomenon to both observe and predict with accuracy. This calendar was known as the *xiali*, or the calendar of the Xia, because it was invented during the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st-16th century B.C.). The Xia calendar was actually reinstated during the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24). It consists of twelve months referred to by number, each of which begins with the new moon and reaches its midpoint with the full moon. These twelve lunations total 354 or 355 days. Like the months themselves, the days included within them are consecutively numbered and do not bear names.

In China, as elsewhere, the major problem in creating a calendar has been to reconcile as much as possible the incommensurate movements of the sun and the moon. Perhaps the situation, where this difficulty is graphically evident, is presented by the four seasons of the year. The seasons are determined not by the changes in the moon but by the sun in relation to the earth's orbit. In fact, the lunar year is eleven days shorter than the solar year and cannot smoothly mesh with seasonal and corresponding agricultural cycles.

The Chinese have attempted to compensate for this discrepancy within the lunar calendar by inserting an intercalary month, usually at three-year but sometimes at two-year intervals, in such a way that seven such "leap years" occur every nineteen years. This additional month may be placed between any two months, except the first, eleventh and twelfth, so that the Winter Solstice always falls in the eleventh month, the Spring Equinox in the second month, the Summer Solstice in the fifth and the Autumn Equinox in the eighth month. The finished product is a calendar in which the date of the lunar New Year, considered the beginning of spring in the Xia calendar, changes from year to year and can fall anywhere in a four-week period around February 4. Obviously, this adjustment could not resolve the seasonal confusion in the Xia calendar, a critical issue for an agricultural society such as ancient China.

Fortunately, help was forthcoming, according to legend, in the person of a young man named Wan Nian. As the story goes, Wan noticed that particular farming tasks were sometimes conducted out of season because the lunar calendar then employed could not accurately account for climatic changes. Through a prolonged period of meticulous observation, Wan Nian came to more precisely understand how the seasonal changes were determined by the position of the sun in relation to the earth, and concluded that a solar calendar was the solution. With the aid of a clepsydra and sundial that he invented, Wan discovered that the true length of the earth's year was 365. days, because the day with the shortest duration of daylight recurs at that interval. He then set the Winter Solstice of what would later become the Twenty-four Solar Terms to coincide with that day.

At that time, the Winter Solstice or Dongzhi was considered by the Chinese to be more important than the lunar New Year. Ideally all of the family should gather together this day for a reunion dinner. It is the solar counterpart of the lunar New Year.

While the story of Wan Nian may not be true, the *Huainanzi*, an anthology of various schools of thought compiled during the Western Han Dynasty, points out that the farmers around the Yellow River began to arrange agricultural activities according to the Twenty-four Solar Terms. The ancient Chinese did not discard the lunar calendar, but continued to incorporate both the solar and lunar calendar in their time reckoning.

How, therefore, is the year divided into the Twenty-four Solar Terms? In astronomical terms, whenever the earth covers fifteen degrees of its orbit around the sun, which takes a period of about fifteen days, a solar term passes. Two solar terms commence within every month. The odd-numbered solar terms are known as "zhongqi" and the even-numbered ones as "jieqi".

The dates of each of the Twenty-four Solar Terms are relatively fixed in the Gregorian calendar or *yangli*. (See box for names and periods of the solar terms.) Before July, the two solar terms begin respectively around the sixth and twenty-first of each month, and after July, around the eighth and twenty-third. What may be the calendar's most striking feature is the placing of the seasonal beginnings exactly midway between the solstices and equinoxes instead of, as in the West, six weeks later. In the West, August 8 is still the height of summer whereas in the lunar calendar it marks the beginning of autumn. November 7 is still autumn in the West but in the lunar calendar it inaugurates winter.

The Twenty-four Solar Terms have played an important role in agriculture, and because China's economy has been agriculturally based, on the society at large. Even today they are still carefully noted by farmers. Every area has its own sayings to remind farmers of which specific task they should perform at different solar terms.

Not only rural people, but also urban residents employ the solar terms as a way of reckoning the seasons. As time passes by, it seems that the younger generation is losing interest, as many young people today recognize but a few solar terms which are related to festivals. The most noteworthy such instance of a solar term marking a festival is the Qingming (Pure Brightness) Festival. The beginning of this solar term, usually around April 5, is a traditional festival for Chinese to pay respect to their deceased ancestors and to go on outings to gravesites.

So far as is known, the Chinese are the major people who have employed two parallel calendar systems, and thereby, one might say, they have enjoyed the best of both worlds, both lunar and solar.

The 24-Solar Terms

Solar Term	Approximate Date	Corresponding Name
1st	4 Feb.	Beginning of Spring
2nd	20 Feb.	Rain Water
3rd	5 Mar.	Waking of Insects
4th	20 Mar.	Spring Equinox
5th	5 Apr.	Pure Brightness
6th	20 Apr.	Grain Rain
7th	6 May	Beginning of Summer
8th	21 May	Grain Full
9th	6 Jun.	Grain in Ear
10th	21 Jun.	Summer Solstice
11th	7 July	Slight Heat
12th	23 July	Great Heat
13th	8 Aug.	Beginning of Autumn
14th	23 Aug.	Limit of Heat
15th	7 Sept.	White Dew
16th	23 Sept.	Autumn Equinox
17th	8 Oct.	Cold Dew
18th	23 Oct.	Frost's Descent
19th	7 Nov.	Beginning of Winter
20th	22 Nov.	Slight Snow
21st	7 Dec.	Great Snow
22nd	22 Dec.	Winter Solstice
23rd	6 Jan.	Slight Cold
24th	21 Jan.	Great Cold

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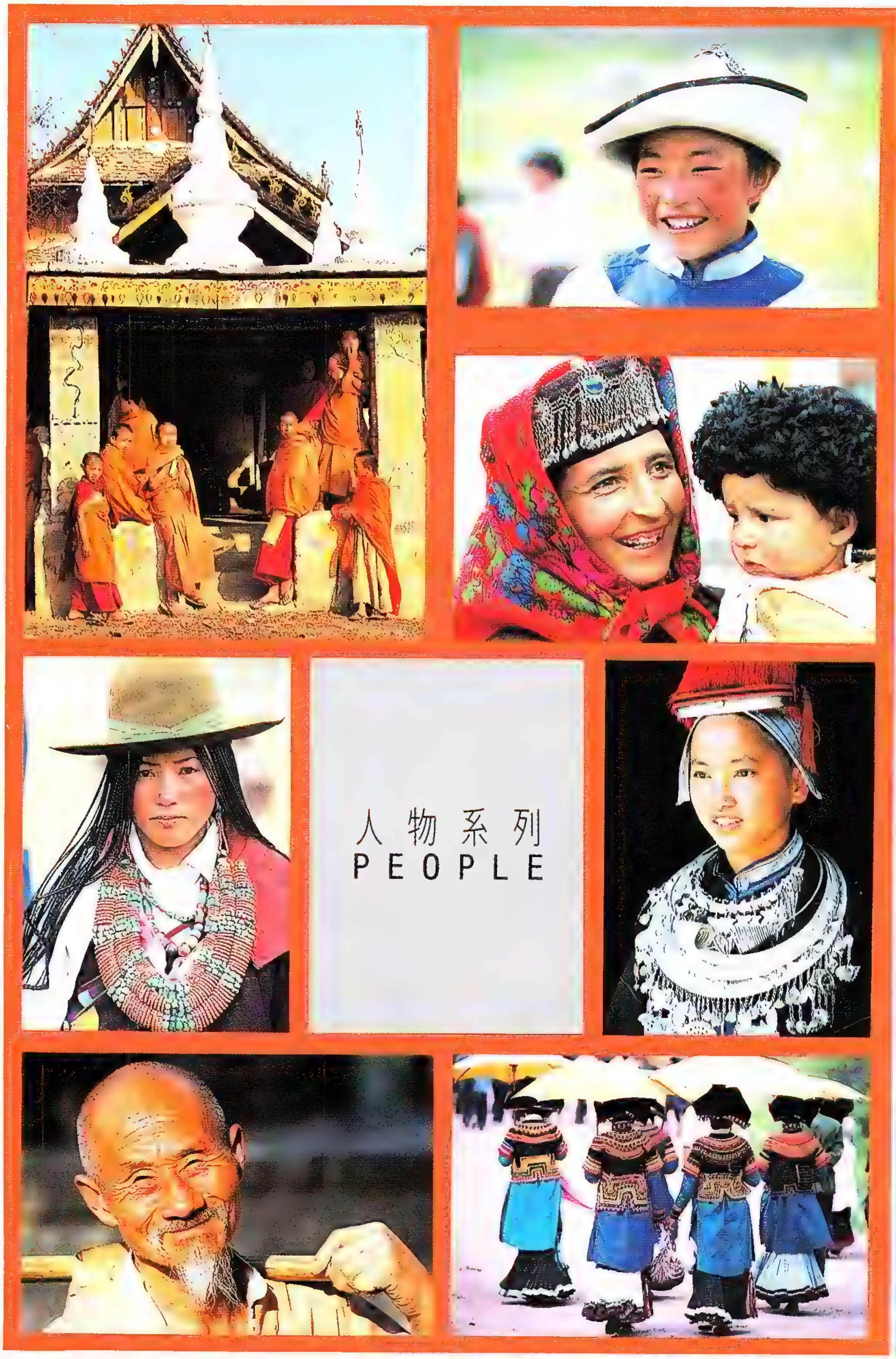

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NEWS

Chongqing-Fuzhou Air Route

China Southwest Airlines is providing this service using Boeing 737 aircraft to connect **Chongqing, Sichuan** and **Fuzhou, Fujian.** This route stretches 1,580 kilometres and takes two hours and 20 minutes. There are two flights a week on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Yangtse Delta Bus Tour

China Travel Service East China Tourist Bus Company, a joint venture set up by five different travel companies, has been set up in Shanghai to manage convenient bus tours of the Yangtse Delta. The tours visit the major cities of Shanghai, Suzhou, Nanjing and Hangzhou, as well as other scenic spots in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces including Wuxi, Yixing, Shaoxing, Yangzhou, Zhenjiang and Thousand Island Lake. They are especially designed to provide comfortable and enjoyable travelling to larger tour groups. The buses, which seat fifty, are air-conditioned with soft, high-backed seats and are equipped with closed-circuit television and karaoke.

Guan Hanqing Memorial Hall Reaches Milestone

The memorial hall for Guan Hanqing, an outstanding Chinese playwright who lived in the latter half of the thirteenth century, has attracted more than 200,000 tourists since it opened last year. Guan, who wrote 63 plays, was listed as one of the leading cultural figures in the world by the Council of the 1958 World Peace Conference. Guan Hanqing Memorial Hall is in Anguo City in Hebei Province. The memorial hall was constructed in the ancient Chinese architectural style.

Guangzhou-Huizhou Rail Connection

Passenger trains have started running on the first stretch between Guangzhou and Huizhou, measuring 150 km of the planned Guangzhou-Meizhou-Shantou railway line. The total length of the line when finally completed is to be 570 kilometres, and the whole line is expected to become operational by early 1996.

Baodugu Nature Reserve Now a National Forest Park

The Baodugu Nature Reserve, located between the cities of Zaozhuang and Linyi at an altitude of 584 metres in southern Shandong Province, has been officially listed as a forest park at the national level. Covering 1,500 hectares of mixed forest with a proportion of evergreen subtropical broad-leaf trees rarely seen in North China, it is rich in natural flora and fauna. The reserve is also a potential tourist site, as it boasts not only a great number of historical sites, such as Taoist temples built during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), relief sculptures carved on precipices and stone inscriptions left by famous figures, but also picturesque landscapes.

Mainland Relics Exhibited in Taiwan

The China Cultural Relics Promotion Centre and the Vision Foundation of Taiwan have organized an exhibition of 116 mainland cultural relics in the Taipei Art Centre, which will continue until May of 1993. The exhibition features four major areas: relics unearthed from Qin Dynasty tombs in Shaanxi; relics unearthed from tombs of the Western Han Dynasty in Mancheng County, Hebei; relics unearthed from tombs of the king of the Zhongshan Kingdom of the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) in Pingshan County, Hebei and relics of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) unearthed in Henan. The two precious sets of artifacts focus on Qin terra-cotta soldiers and horses and a Western Han Dynasty jade burial suit.

Dragon Boat Culture Development District

Yueyang City in Hunan plans to set up a "Dragon Boat Culture Development District" in its scenic area of Nanhu Lake. The nearby Miluo River is said to be where Qu Yuan, an eminent poet in the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), sacrificed his life for the betterment of his country. It is alleged that for more than 1,500 years, dragon boat races on the river have been a tradition for memorializing this national hero. The development programme for the new district includes tourism projects, real estate business expansion, and a dragon boat museum as well as other projects in the communications, industrial, agricultural and commercial fields.

Heilongjiang Hunting Ground Activities

The Yuquan Hunting Ground near Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, plans to host a series of tourism activities this winter under the theme "The Happy Ice and Snow World". In addition to hunting and skiing, there are some newly added activities such as sleigh-riding and target-shooting. A street including restaurants, hotels and shops is due to open soon in the ground. The hunting ground, covering some 3,000 hectares, is the largest of its kind in China and has welcomed more than 600,000 domestic and overseas visitors since 1987.

First Yao Nationality Museum

The first Yao Minority Nationality Museum, located in the county seat of Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County in Guangxi, is now open to the public. Covering an area of about eight hundred square metres, the museum's collection features more than 1,500 Yao costumes, daily necessities and Yao historical stone tablets. Guangxi is home to approximately 900,000 Yaos from five major branches of that minority nationality. During the past decades, Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County has been dubbed the "Cradle of Yao Culture" by contemporary French, Japanese and American scholars.

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NEXT ISSUE

In our next issue, we present decidedly unique Shang Dynasty bronzes from what some maintain is the province's most significant archaeological site in Sanxingdui and then visit the numerous teahouses which now serve as entertainment and cultural centres. Then we take you to discover some of China's most fascinating tourist attractions in the outskirts of Beijing before heading south to view the panorama of the scenic Nanxi River in Zhejiang near Wenzhou before winding up in Huizhou; Guangdong, where the famous Song Dynasty poet Su Dongpo was once relegated.

- **Sanxingdui — Sichuan's Most Significant Archaeological Site**

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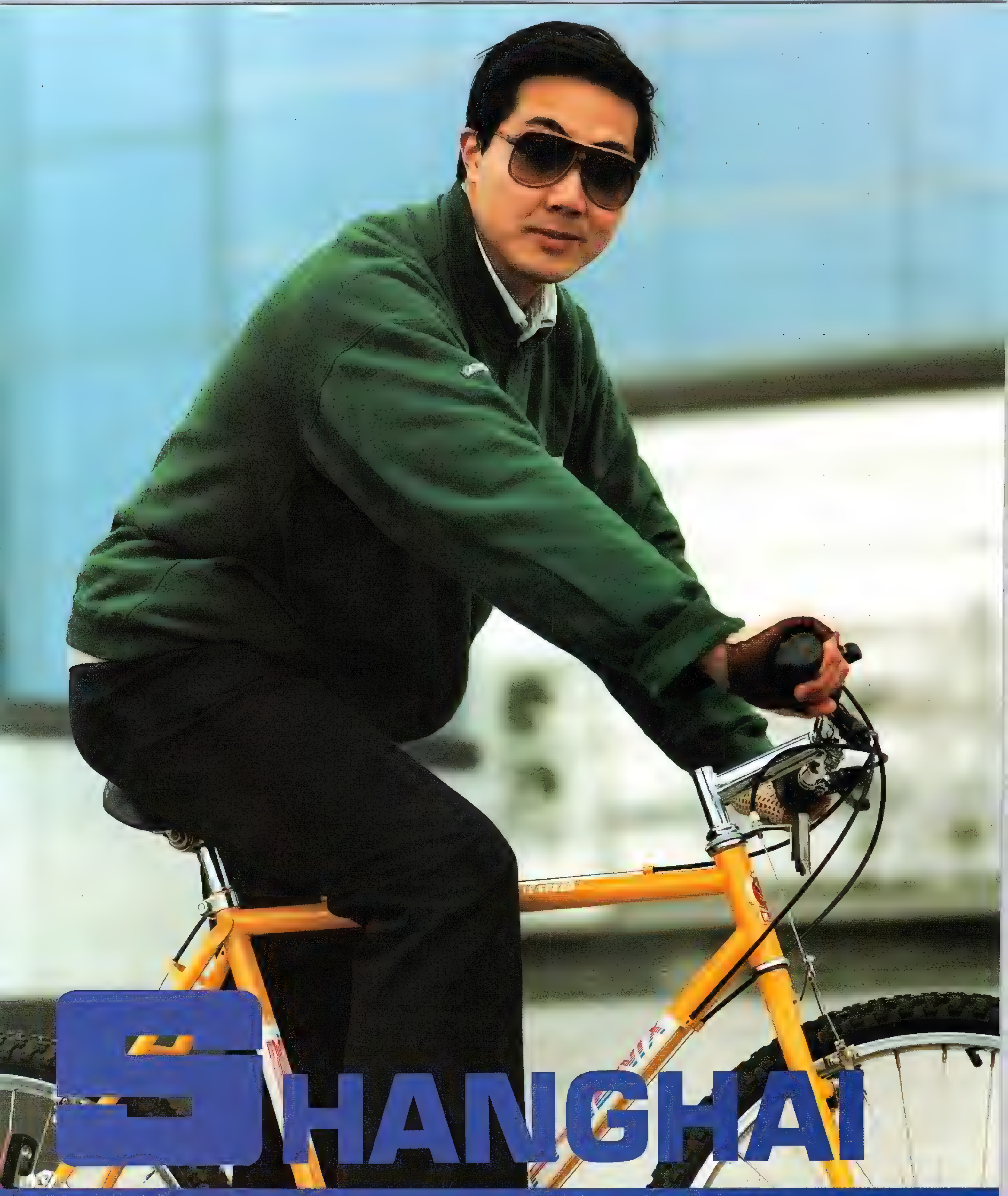

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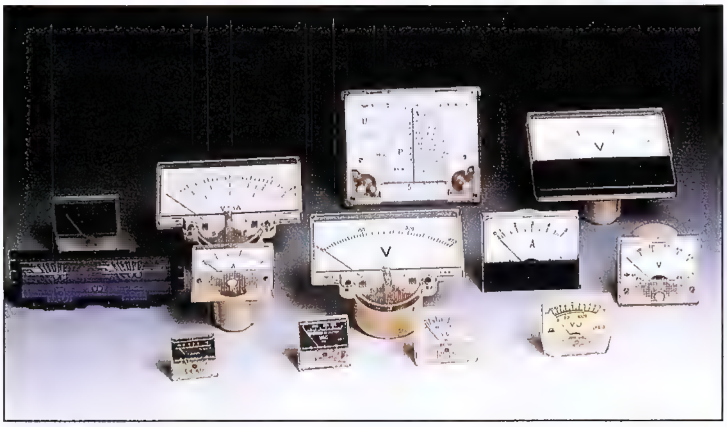

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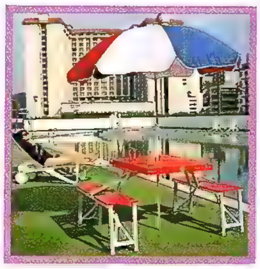

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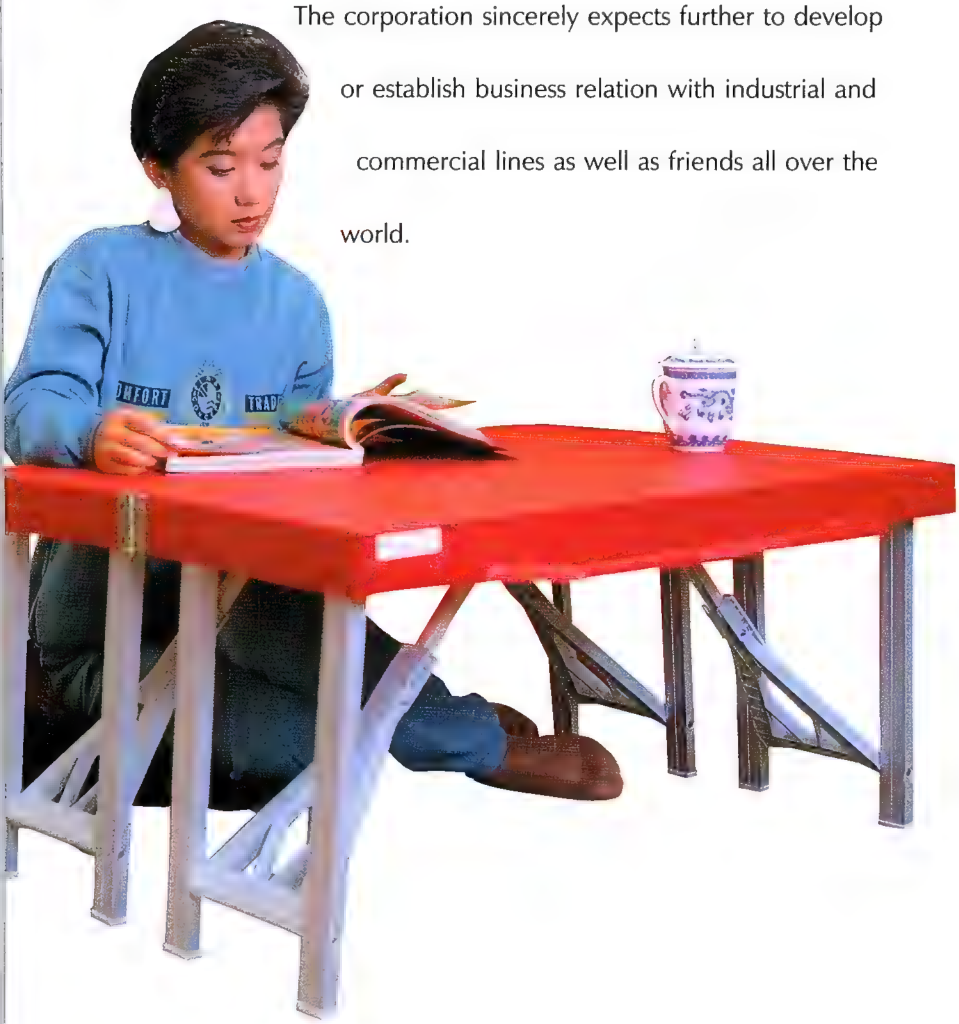

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Scope of export commodities management

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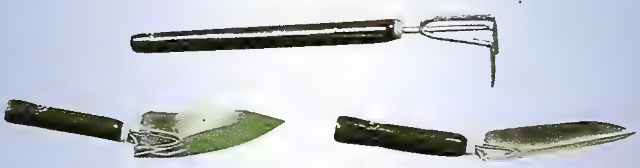

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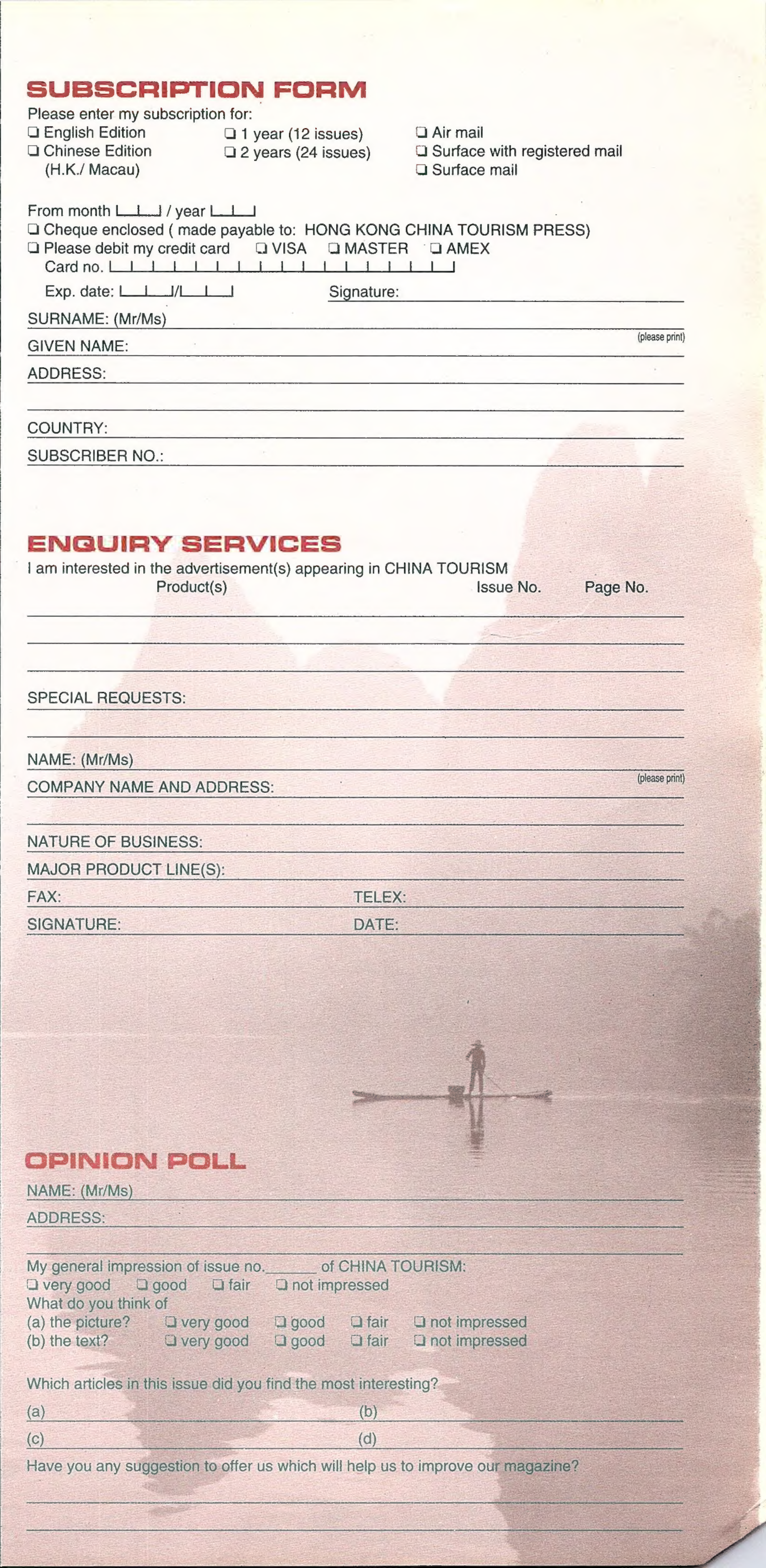

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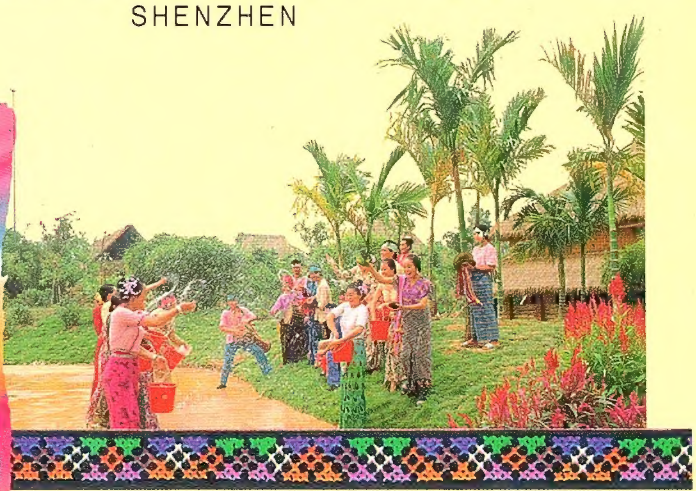
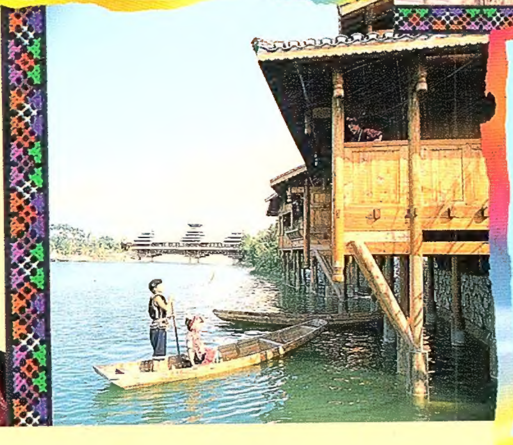
深圳 中国民俗文化村

China Folk Culture Villages

SHENZHEN



With an area of 180,000 square metres, China Folk Culture Villages is adjacent to ''Splendid China'' Scenic Spot. Built in the Villages are 24 villages of China's minority nationalities who are living in Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Tibet, Hunan, Xinjiang, Inner Monglia, etc. as well as more than 20 well-known scenic spots, which are all built on the scale of 1:1. Here you can enjoy the performance of folk song and dance, and folk acrobatics presented by a few hundred minority artists. You will also get some idea of folk arts, and customs and lives of China's various minority nationalities.



- China Folk Culture Villages consisting of the world's largest number of minority nationalities
- The world's largest man-made stone forest, banyan, waterfall, cave and the largest laser folk music fountain in the world
- Appreciating all kinds of folk customs and local conditions
- Enjoying primitive, graceful song and dance
- Having a taste of unique flavour of local snacks and delicacies
- A grand ''Folk Arts Parade'' held each day
- Folk festive celebrations held each month

CHINA TRAVEL SERVICE (HONG KONG) LIMITED

(General Agent for the Business of ''China Folk Culture Villages''
in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan as well as Overseas)

CTS House, 78-83 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong.
Tel.: 853 3888 Licence No.: 350273

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